

Renaissance Texts, Medieval Subjectivities:
Vernacular Genealogies of English Petrarchism
from Wyatt to Wroth

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the symbolic presence of medieval forms of textual selfhood in early modern English Petrarchan poetry. Seeking to problematize the notion of Petrarchism as a Renaissance discourse *par excellence*, as a radical departure from the medieval past marking the birth of the modern poetic voice, the thesis undertakes a systematic re-reading of a significant body of early modern English Petrarchan texts through the prism of late medieval English poetry. I argue that medieval poetic texts inscribe in the vernacular literary imaginary (i.e. a repository of discursive forms and identities available to early modern writers through antecedent and contemporaneous literary utterances) a network of recognizable and iterable discursive structures and associated subject positions; and that various linguistic and ideological traces of these medieval discourses and selves can be discovered in early modern English Petrarchism. Methodologically, the dissertation's engagement with poetic texts across the lines of periodization is at once genealogical and hermeneutic. The principal objective of the dissertation is to uncover a vernacular history behind the subjects of early modern English Petrarchan poems and sonnet sequences. At the same time, medieval poetics imbricated within the textures of early modern Petrarchan discourse also operate as a subtle yet powerful interpretive code which, when applied to the early modern texts, helps to elicit new readings of the canonical texts.

The dissertation is structured as a series of case studies, with each of the four chapters tracing the medieval genealogy of a distinct scenario of subjectivity deployed by English Renaissance Petrarchism. The first chapter considers the significance of William Langland's poetics of meed (reward) articulated in passūs II-IV of *Piers Plowman* for the anti-laureate and anti-courtly identities assumed by Thomas Wyatt in his Petrarchan poems and by Edmund Spenser in the *Amoretti*. I suggest that Langland's anxiety regarding the alignment of pecuniary and erotic aspects of reward makes it problematic for subsequent writers to pursue a form of poetic identity which embraces both courtly

and laureate ambitions. The second chapter examines the persistence of vernacular melancholy (encapsulated in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*) in the verse of Henry Howard, earl of Surrey (as it was printed in Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes*) and in Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. The poetics of melancholy engenders a fragmented subjectivity that manifests itself through a series of quasi-theatrical performances of identity, as well as an ambivalent form of poetic discourse in which the production of Petrarchism is carried out alongside its radical critique. The focus of chapter three is the master trope of royal incarceration and its function as a mechanism of subject formation in the poetry of James I Stewart, Charles of Orleans, Mary Stewart, and Lady Mary Wroth. As the dissertation argues, the figure of an imprisoned sovereign in these texts is not an accidental coinage but in fact a crucial ideologeme of the pre-modern English political and literary imaginary, underwriting the poetics and politics of royal identity from Sir John Fortescue to James VI/I. Lastly, the fourth chapter investigates the vernacular medieval genealogy of the subject afflicted with a malady of desire (in other words, pathological affect) in Shakespeare's sonnets, by tracing its inchoate vernacular precedents back to the poems of Thomas Hoccleve (*La Male Regle*) and Robert Henryson (*The Testament of Cresseid*), which not only articulate identity and otherness in terms of disease and health but, like Shakespeare's sonnets, prefigure the triangular relationship of the speaker with two objects of desire.

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Introduction

Vernacular Genealogies of Petrarchan Discourse

I would like to begin by invoking two celebrated events in the history of English poetry in general, and of English Petrarchism in particular. The first one is the soliloquy of the lovesick Troilus in Geoffrey Chaucer's romance *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1380s):

If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
Whenne every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I the more that ich it drynke.

And if that at myn owen lust I brenne,
From whennes cometh my waillynge and my pleynte?
If harme agree me, wherto pleyne I thenne?
I noot, ne whi unwery that I feynte.
O quike deth, O swete harm so queynte,
How may of the in me swich quantite,
But if that I consente that it be?

And if that I consente, I wrongfully
Compleyne, iwis. Thus passed to and fro,
Al sterelees withinne a boot am I

Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two,
That in contrarie stonden evere mo.
Allas, what is this wondre maladie?
For hete of cold, for cold of hete, I dye.” (I.400-20)¹

What is remarkable about these three stanzas is not that Chaucer, arresting his narrative, deploys what is in essence a first-person lyric poem in an attempt to represent the sophistication of Troilus’s psychic and emotional disturbance upon his first sighting of Criseyde. Rather, in the context of literary history the crucial detail here is that Troilus’s complaint is a translation of Petrarch’s sonnet 132 “*S’amor non é, che dunque é quell ch’io sento*” (“If it is not love, what then is it that I feel”), the first instance of translation of Petrarch’s lyric poetry into English. In these twenty-one lines, Petrarchan desire and, perhaps more crucially, Petrarchan diction with its characteristic oxymora, antitheses, and paradoxes that configure the conflicting vicissitudes of erotic selfhood, enter English poetic discourse for the first time.²

The second event is harder to date precisely, but it takes place roughly 150 years after Chaucer’s experiment with Petrarchism and is associated with Thomas Wyatt’s English translations, adaptations, and imitations of Petrarch’s poems in the 1520s and 1530s. In a handful of sonnets and other lyrics Wyatt configures his amorous first-person in a language largely derived from the Petrarchan template, fashioning a vernacular vehicle for expressions of complex, warped subjectivity. As a host of followers from Surrey to Shakespeare and Wroth evinces, Wyatt’s Petrarchan idiom proved remarkably durable in English lyric poetry. With the 1557 printing of the first edition of Richard Tottel’s poetic collection *Songes and sonettes* (commonly known as *Tottel’s Miscellany*), Petrarchan poems of Wyatt and Surrey became a public affair (the collection had undergone eleven editions before

¹ All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

² In this regard, Chaucer’s choice of the poem for translation could not have been more fortuitous. Pietro Boitani considers *RVF* 132-134 and their diction to be central to the first part of the *Canzoniere*, largely typifying the Petrarchan style (56-74).

1589), and Petrarchism trickled through various circles of readers and writers, inscribing (rather, imprinting) itself upon English poetic discourse.³

While these two events in English literary history in themselves are hardly in doubt, the relationship between them is pregnant with questions and uncertainties. Does Chaucer indeed introduce Petrarchan subjectivity into English poetry, or does the latter have to wait for Wyatt to open it fully to Italian influence? Does Chaucer's Petrarchan intervention have any valence for subsequent poets, or does Wyatt break new textual ground in his Petrarchan poems? Is the medieval form of rhyme royal incompatible with the logical and imaginative intricacies of the Italian sonnet, or do the Middle English versions of Petrarchan tropes transcend the limits of stanzaic form and exercise their influence on how poetry is written in English for those who come after Chaucer? When the second wave of Italian influence breaks against the English shores, can one discern in the texts of the Tudor Petrarchists traces of the first ripple (i.e. Chaucer)? With Wyatt and Surrey, does English poetry simply re-discover Petrarchism, or is Wyatt's Petrarchan selfhood a genuine discovery? Is there a relationship of continuity between Chaucer and Wyatt, or is the history of English poetry ruptured by the fifteenth century that seemingly ignores Petrarchan desire?

Perhaps these questions are misleading because, as Robert Meyer-Lee argues in *Poets and Power* (1-11), they – erroneously – imply that nothing happens in English poetry between Chaucer and Wyatt. Yet there is no shortage of critical opinions on the subject. Michael Spiller in *The Development of the Sonnet* argues that Chaucer, as a medieval writer, fails to recognize not only the form of the sonnet but the unique Petrarchan “I” as well (“when he did encounter Petrarch’s lyric /I/, he read it as the /I/ of medieval *pleynt*”) and so shifts his version away from the unique sufferings of an individual self towards metaphysical universality (64-67). Patricia Thomson, in contrast, writes that Chaucer’s translation of the Italian sonnet “marks the beginning of English Petrarchan love poetry ... the purveyance into English poetry of its characteristic matter, form, and style,” although she none-

³ Subsequent references to Tottel’s *Miscellany* are to *Richard Tottel’s ‘Songes and sonettes’* by poem and line number. References to Wyatt’s poems are to Muir and Thomson, by poem and line number.

theless has to concede that it “is an isolated landmark in literary history” (“Canticus” 313-14). Similarly, A. C. Spearing has claimed, in a more general context, that “the work of the literary Renaissance, which Chaucer had begun single-handed, had to be done all over again in the sixteenth century” (*Medieval* 120). David Wallace, while he urges us to “suspend belief in cultural partitions such as ‘medieval,’ ‘Renaissance,’ and ‘humanist,’” arguing that there is “nothing going on in Petrarch and Boccaccio that cannot, with profit, be brought into intelligible relation with Chaucer,” nevertheless skeptically appraises the significance of Petrarch’s vernacular poetry in pre-modern England, pointing out that Chaucer’s “Canticus Troili” is the sole specimen of Petrarchism anywhere outside of Italy prior to 1500 (*Chaucerian Polity* 7, 263). By contrast, Robin Kirkpatrick points out that though Chaucer’s translation of Petrarch’s *‘S’amor non è ...’* does not appear to have set an immediate trend, it was still acknowledged by Tudor and Elizabethan writers (116). Perhaps the most ambitious claim comes from William Rossiter, who argues for an overwhelming effect of Chaucer’s translation on subsequent English poetic practice, writing that “Canticus Troili” grants “a mandate for later poets such as Wyatt and Surrey” and “lays the formal foundations for the English sonnet” (130-31).

That Chaucer’s version of Petrarchism differs from Wyatt’s in form, intention, meaning, and consequence goes without saying, as the 150 years that separate the two poets cannot be undone. At the same time, Chaucer and Wyatt still have much in common: in addition to sharing a vernacular kingdom, they are inextricably linked together by poetic discourse, for the Petrarchan figures and the subjectivity effect they produce in the “Canticus” become part of the repertory of verbal forms and associated poetic identities that subsequent English poets can draw upon. Wyatt did not translate *RVF* 132 himself, but he rendered in English the adjoining and thematically cognate *RVF* 134 “*Pace non trovo et non òda far guerra*” as “I finde no peace and all my warre is done” (XXVI), which likewise develops the oxymoronic structure of Petrarchan desire. He also translated *RVF* 189 “*Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio*” as “My galy charged with forgetfulnes” (XXVIII), whose conceit of a lover pic-

tured as a ship tossed on the stormy sea is already contained in Chaucer's translation of *RVF* 132.⁴ Even more tellingly, when Thomas Watson in his sonnet sequence *Ἐκατομπαθία, or, Passionate Centurie of Love* (1582) translates *RVF* 132 as "If't be not love I feel, what is it then?" he finds himself forced to account for his early modern Petrarchan poem's relationship with Chaucer's medieval version: "All this passion (two verses only excepted) is wholly translated out of Petrarch ... Heerein certaine contrarieties, whiche are incident to him that loueth extreemelye, are liuely expressed by a Metaphor," Watson announces, and immediately adds, "And it may be noted, that the Author in his first halfe verse of this translation varieth from that sense, which Chawcer vseth in translating the selfe same [poem]" (41).⁵

Although Watson's anxiety regarding the proprietary rights of his discourse (is this sonnet more Petrarchan or Chaucerian?) is an archetypal Petrarchan manoeuvre (cf. M. Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics* 54-56), he seems, oddly, more concerned to wrestle his poem from the grip of his English predecessor rather than to distance himself from the Italian master. It is as though Watson fears that his English sonnet (whose eighteen-line form, incidentally, appears closer to Chaucer's three rhyme royal stanzas of the "Canticus" than to the standard Petrarchan fourteen-line sonnet), since it is written in what he feels to be a language marked by a subtle Chaucerian presence, may be subsumed by the discourse of the medieval poet, and is obliged to stake his claim. One might well describe Watson's unease in Bakhtinian terms: as a realization that his poetic utterance is "a link in the chain of speech communication" which "has clear-cut boundaries that are determined by the change of speech subjects (speakers), but within these boundaries the utterance ... reflects the speech process, others' utterances, and, above all, preceding links in the chain (sometimes close and sometimes – in areas of

⁴ On Chaucer's maiden role in the coinage of the courtly English oxymoron, see T. Greene, *Light in Troy* 248; Kirkpatrick 52-55; Spearing, *Medieval* 64; for Chaucer's nautical metaphor as providing "readily accessible vernacular terms that were to become a shorthand for suggesting the Petrarchan tradition," see D. Kay, *Shakespeare* 101.

⁵ Equally tellingly, Watson's sequence opens with "A Quartozain of the Author vnto his booke of Louepassions" (36), which contains an implicit but transparent allusion to Chaucer: "My little booke goe hye thee hence away," a paraphrase of Chaucer's "Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedy" (*Troilus* V.1786).

cultural communication – very distant)” (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 93, also 60-102). Watson’s poem as it were “reflects” Chaucer’s translation of Petrarch’s sonnet, discovering within itself traces of the medieval text.

The example of Watson, a very self-conscious translator (Clucas 222) who cannot possibly turn a blind eye on the existence of another version of Petrarch’s sonnet in English, is perhaps the most salient example of the power of medieval discourse to shape early modern poetic utterances, but it is by no means the only one. By the same token, an anonymous poet from the Park-Hill Manuscript (BL Add. 36529) in his or her version of *RVF* 132 not only replicates a good deal of Chaucer’s poetic vocabulary but symptomatically misreads the first line of the Italian original as “If love be not, what throes do I sustain,” which Anthony Mortimer speculatively puts down to the transformative effect of Chaucer’s misreading of Petrarch (76).⁶ It may well be that Rossiter overstates the case when he claims that Chaucer in the “Canticus” “lays the formal foundations for the English sonnet.” What is impossible to ignore, however, is that for early modern English sonneteers Petrarchan desire seems mediated by the vernacular medium in which they express it.

The import of Chaucerian discourse for English Petrarchan writing becomes even more pronounced when we detach ourselves from the single example of Chaucer’s Petrarchism and consider the broader adaptability of his medieval poetic style in early modern England. *Tottel’s Miscellany* yields an illuminating example. The book printed the works of the “new” poets, Wyatt and Surrey, “to the honor of the english tong, and for profit of the studious of Englishe eloquence,” as the printer phrased it.⁷ It was a thematically and formally diverse collection, and yet largely a Petrarchan enterprise dominated by the figure of the “lover” who tirelessly laments and bewails his hopeless state. At one point Tottel’s *Miscellany* calls Petrarch “hed and prince of poets al / Whose lively gift of flowing eloquence, / Wel may we seke, but finde not” (188.1-2) and claims that “With Petrarke to compare

⁶ On Chaucer’s deviations from the Italian original, see Thomson, “Canticus” 317-20; Wilkins 169-70.

⁷ See *Richard Tottel’s ‘Songes and sonettes’: The Elizabethan Version* (1).

ther may no wight” (189.1).⁸ Yet one finds in the “uncertain authors” section “Flee from the prease and dwell with sothfastnes” (207), one of Chaucer’s minor poems (traditionally referred to as “Truth”). It is rather intriguing how easily the early modern printer incorporates a medieval non-courtly poem in his collection, and how seamlessly it blends with the surrounding texts that post-date it by at least 150 years. “Flee from the prease” is of course not a courtly, let alone a Petrarchan, poem. However, thrust between “A comparison of his love with the faithful and painful love of Troilus and Creside” (206), with its allusions to Chaucer’s romance, on the one side, and a Petrarchan poem in which “The wounded lover determineth to make sute to his lady for his recure” (208) on the other, Chaucer’s philosophical exhortation to the readers (titled by Tottel “To leade a virtuous and honest life”) does not seem to violate the discursive consistency of the collection. Its diction, meter, and style, at any rate, do not preclude its amalgamation with the early modern courtly textual surroundings. As Hyder Rollins, the editor of the first version of *Tottel’s Miscellany*, observes, the poem was probably taken from William Thynne’s edition of Chaucer’s works and, as a result, “Chaucer seems no more archaic in style than Wyatt himself” (2:80). Other mid-Tudor poetic collections, such as Barnabe Googe’s *Eglogs, Epytaphes, and Sonettes* (1563), George Turberville’s *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (1567, 1570) and Thomas Howell’s *Newe Sonets and Pretie Pamphlets* (1570, 1575), also display what Cathy Shrank has characterized as a “self-consciousness regarding their potential contribution in building a native literary heritage” (“Matters” 48), found in their invocations of Chaucer and Gower as legitimizing precedents for the Renaissance articulations of Petrarchan sensibilities.

These instances of interweaving between medieval poetic discourse and early modern Petrarchism bring me to the central argument of this dissertation. I investigate the role the medieval languages of English vernacular poetry played in articulations of Petrarchan desire and Petrarchan sub-

⁸ On Renaissance Petrarchism and the lover figure in *Tottel’s Miscellany*, see Kennedy, *Authorizing* 233-35; Marotti, *Manuscript* 212-19; Wall 23-31, 107-08. On the politics of the collection, see Marquis, “Politics;” for a reading of *Songes and sonettes* in the context of the English Reformation and early modern Catholicism, see Hamrick.

jectivity in Renaissance England. I revisit, in a very specific way, the medieval/early modern divide and argue that medieval poetic texts inscribed in the literary vernacular imaginary recognizable and iterable discursive structures and associated subject positions; and that various linguistic and ideological traces of these medieval discourses and selves can be discovered in early modern English Petrarchism from Wyatt to Wroth. The chapters that follow include discussions of the Langlandian poetics of meed in the Petrarchan texts of Thomas Wyatt and Edmund Spenser; of vernacular melancholy embodied in the Chaucerian poetics of fragmented subjectivity in the *Book of the Duchess* that underpins the poems of Henry Howard earl of Surrey and Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*; of the figures of royal imprisonment and sovereign desire in the prison poems of James I Stewart (*The Kingis Quair*) and Charles d'Orléans, and in the casket sonnets attributed to Mary Stewart; and of the pathological affect in the poems of Thomas Hoccleve, Robert Henryson, and William Shakespeare. As my dissertation will seek to argue, in sixteenth-century England Petrarchan desires were in many cases engrafted upon the vernacular poetic medium, reactivating medieval – that is, with the possible exception of Chaucer, pre-Petrarchan – structures of discourse and identity. I demonstrate that the poetic and imaginative vocabularies of early modern English Petrarchan poets contain traces of the poetic languages practiced by various medieval authors, with all the concomitant connotations that persist in the memory of poetic discourse.

Critical Contexts

The immediate backdrop for this project is recent developments in the discipline of literary and cultural studies that have rendered more porous than ever the boundary between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Both historians of medieval literature and early modern scholars display a growing alertness to the elusiveness of the borderlines between “medieval” and “early modern” and question the validity and practicality of traditional compartmentalization in various academic practices. Recent histories of medieval English literature, such as David Wallace's *Cambridge History of Me-*

dieval English Literature (1999) and James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2004), include discussions of the early Tudor period (up to Mary I); and essays in Brian Cummings and James Simpson's new volume *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (2010) range in the even more impressive span between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Likewise, individual monographs and collections of essays traverse the chronological divide and seek to re-connect medieval and early modern culture. Helen Cooper's *English Romance in Time*, Benjamin Griffin's *Playing the Past*, Meyer-Lee's *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*, Paul Strohm's *Politique*, Jennifer Summit's *Lost Property*, David Wallace's *Premodern Places*, and Deane Williams's *French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, as well as the essays in Gordon McMullan and David Mathews's *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* and Curtis Perry and John Watkins's *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, all – while adopting a range of perspectives and critical positions – seek to re-negotiate the relationship between the medieval and the early modern. The same is becoming true of the pedagogical enterprise: recent anthologies of literature and poetry (e.g. Pearsall; Pearsall and Wu) attempt to embrace both medieval and Renaissance authors, further integrating the two once seemingly antagonistic pasts.⁹

It is of course useful to remember that the very notions of “medieval” and “Renaissance” represent a historically constructed terminological opposition rather than an expression of some irreconcilable differences between historical formations. As Brian Stock, *inter alia*, phrases it, “[t]he Renaissance invented the Middle Ages in order to define itself; the Enlightenment perpetuated them in order to admire itself; and the Romantics revived them in order to escape from themselves. In their widest ramifications “the Middle Ages” thus constitute one of the most prevalent cultural myths of the modern world” (69). Indeed, while the modern term “medieval” seems to have appeared in European languages in the nineteenth century, the concept of a dark intermediary period between the classics and

⁹ Of note are also Burrow's *Medieval Writers and their Work*, which includes a chapter on the afterlife of Middle English literature (125-38); and Gertz's guide *Chaucer to Shakespeare, 1337-1580*.

the moderns is a Renaissance invention.¹⁰ Although no one is prepared to deny that historical change took place in the West between what we label the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, few scholars still subscribe to the Burkhardtian view on the supremacy of the Renaissance civilization over its immediate predecessor. In too many respects, it has been successfully argued on numerous occasions, medieval practices, institutions, and forms of imagination persisted well into the modern period, sometimes into the nineteenth century.¹¹ Undoubtedly, there are palpable differences in the ways English culture and society operated and imagined themselves when Chaucer wrote and at the time of Shakespeare's death, yet we should not overlook the fact that in many respects, including politics, medicine, science, economy, and social structures, sixteenth-century England was still quite medieval, for the new continued to exist side by side with the old.

In fact, the two points I have just mentioned – that the Renaissance invented itself against the Middle Ages and that the Middle Ages continued well into, and past, the Renaissance – are two sides of the same argument. That “the early modern was constructed through or in negotiation with the medieval” (McMullan and Mathews, “Introduction” 6) is largely due to the ineluctable presence of medieval elements and phenomena in early modern life. In the realm of literature, this persistence of the medieval was pervasive. Numerous studies on the history of the book and on the practices of literary production, circulation, and consumption have revealed a deep engagement of Renaissance readers and writers with their medieval precursors. During the long sixteenth century, all major medieval writers became available to early modern English readers in new editions. Starting with Caxton's editions of *The Canterbury Tales* (1476, 1483), reprinted by Wynken de Worde in 1498, the complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer appeared in 1526 (edited by Richard Pynson), in 1532, 1542, and 1550 (edited by William Thynne), in 1561 (edited by John Stow), and finally in 1598 (edited by Thomas Speght). Lydgate was equally popular with the Tudor printers: *Temple of Glas* appeared in 1495,

¹⁰ For an overview of the history of the term and concept, see Fred Robinson's fascinating essay “Medieval, the Middle Ages” (esp. 748-49); Ferguson esp. 1-77; Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination* 18-20.

¹¹ See, for example, Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance*; Le Goff, *Birth of Europe* 154-93.

1497, 1500, 1503, 1506, and 1529; *Complaynt of A Loveres Lyf* in 1508 and 1531; the massive *Troy Book* in 1513 and 1555; *The Fall of Princes* in 1494, 1527 and twice in 1554; and *Siege (Destruction) of Thebes* in 1497 and 1561 (as part of Stow's Chaucer). Gower's *Confessio Amantis* was printed by Caxton (1483) and by Thomas Berthelette (1532, 1552); whereas Langland's proto-Protestant *Piers Plowman* won him close attention from the Reformist printer and poet Robert Crowley, who brought out two editions of Langland's poem in 1550. Chaucerian poets such as Hoccleve and Henryson did not warrant separate editions, but their works (e.g. Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*) were routinely printed in the editions of Chaucer among the apocrypha. Medieval writers were re-invented, in social, religious, and political terms, in post-Reformation England (Chaucer, for instance, became a proto-Protestant writer), but their presence in the cultural space of the Renaissance, as institutionalized authors who give historical credit to new forms of writing, is impossible to ignore.¹²

Similarly, manuscript circulation often did not distinguish between old poems and fragments and new, and consequently widely embraced medieval texts (Boffey, *Manuscripts*; McKitterick 17-18). John Stow (1525-1605), a celebrated Elizabethan antiquarian and editor of the 1561 version of *The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer*, was evidently in possession of several manuscripts of Middle English poetry (in addition to various chronicles and romances), including a number of Chaucer's and Lydgate's poems, and *The Letter of Cupid*, *The Regiment of Princes*, and the *Series* by Thomas Hoccleve (A. S. G. Edwards). Of course enormous numbers of books were lost in the wake of the Reformation (monasteries had been principal sites of collecting and preserving books in pre-Reformation England), but many did survive and were recruited to contribute to the project of English nationalism. As Jennifer Summit has demonstrated, what manuscripts and book were saved became the foundation of the new English libraries which now served a nationalist rather than a religious purpose (*Memory's Library* 1-3, passim).

¹² There is vast scholarship on the practices and ideologies of the printing of medieval authors in early modern England. On Chaucer and Lydgate, see Gillespie; Krier; Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*; Miskimin; Pask 9-52; Prendergast; Prendergast and Kline; Simpson, *Reform* 38-44; and essays in Ruggiers. On Gower, see Blake; on Langland, see Hailey; M. R. Jones 116-32; King, *English Reformation* 319-39; Norbrook 36-37; L. Scanlon, "Langland," Thorne and Urhart.

The Reformation in England, increasingly highlighting the transience of such material signs of nationhood as buildings and monuments, shifted emphasis to texts and their immaterial contents as the primary instruments that define nationhood. The English Reformation, it has been suggested, was largely a “literary event” that elevated books, reading, and writing in the vernacular to the status of privileged tools in defining and promoting the idea of English nationhood (Cummings 824). The English literary past was conscripted by various groups of readers in order to legitimize the present, and the making of vernacular tradition and of the English canon in the sixteenth century was tightly interwoven with the post-Reformation recovery of the medieval English past.¹³ The time of most violent destruction of national memory, Trevor Ross has shown (51-64), was also the time when the national literary canon was inaugurated. The key figures in this process were the humanist antiquarian John Leland (1503-1552) and the radical Protestant writer John Bale (1495-1563), who both tried to rescue the past by creating catalogues of names and texts that preserved British literary antiquity. England’s glory could be recovered, they believed, through a dissemination of texts, including literary ones. Both Leland and Bale left behind biobibliographical catalogues that give an indication of what medieval literature was imagined to have been in Tudor England. Leland’s *De viris illustribus* remained unpublished in his lifetime but available in manuscript to Bale, Leland’s literary executor upon his descent into insanity, and became part of Bale’s own catalogue. Bale’s *Scriptorum illustrium maioris britanniae catalogus* (printed in 1548 and, in augmented form, in 1557 and 1559), was aimed at “charting a recognizable British history of writing, a native voice, to complement the history of a distinct native church” (Hadfield, *Literature* 70). It contains, among others, entries on Chaucer, Gower, Hawes, Hoccleve, Lydgate, Langland, Malory, and others that to us today would constitute the Middle English canon.¹⁴

¹³ On “writing the nation” in post-Reformation England, see Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*; Hadfield, *Literature*; McEachern; Woolf; Schwyzer; Shrank, *Writing the Nation*.

¹⁴ On Leland’s and Bale’s catalogues, see Hadfield, *Literature* 69-70; T. Ross 51-64; Simpson, *Reform* 7-33; Schwyzer 60-75.

Even more to the point, if we turn to some of the critical works of Elizabethan writers, we discover there a pronounced sense of discursive continuity with late medieval poetry. George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), perhaps the most famous theoretical work in early modern England after Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry*, marks the specific boundaries of what constitutes a common space between his age and the past. "I will not reach," he writes, "aboue the time of king *Edward* the third and *Richard* the second for any that wrote in English meter, because before their times, by reason of the late Normane conquest, which had brought into this Realme much alteration both of our language and lawes ... so as beyond that time there is litle or nothing worth commendation to be founde written in this arte." He proceeds to name "*Chaucer* and *Gower*, both of them ... *Knights*," "*Iohn Lydgate*, the monke of Bury, & that nameless, who wrote the *Satyre* called *Piers Plowman*," until by way of Skelton, Wyatt and Surrey, and the likes of Nicholas Vaux, he reaches the Elizabethan courtiers such as Gascoigne, Sidney, Greville, Dyer, and Raleigh (62-63). Despite Puttenham's negative remarks about some of the medieval writers on his list, especially Langland (64-65), Ricardian and Lancastrian poetry is presented as part of the imaginary continuum of poetic intelligibility. Nothing outside this frame is worth discussing, but what falls within it may in some way or other be relevant to Elizabethan readers and writers. Similarly, William Webbe in his *Discorse of English Poetrie* (1586) locates the origins of the English poetry that deserves to be part of an Elizabethan writer's native tradition in the reign of Richard II: "the first of our English Poets I haue heard of was Iohn Gower, about the time of king Rychard the second ... whose workes I could wyshe they were all whole and perfect among vs, for no doubt they contained very much deep knowledge and delight." Gower's name is followed by that of "Chawcer ... the God of English Poets," Lydgate, and "Pierce Ploughman," before Webbe moves to the sixteenth century (240-42). Sidney himself in his *Apologie*, despite his cheerless view of past and present English poetry, grants Chaucer and Gower the inaugural role in the development of English poetic discourse by analogy with the great Italians of the Renaissance: "So in the Italian language the first that made it aspire to be a Treasure-house of Science were the Poets *Dante*, *Boccace*, and *Petrarch*. So in our English were *Gower* and *Chawcer*" (152).

These claims have two important things in common. First, they validate the assumption that medieval poetry was part of the imaginary literary universe in early modern England; and second, they imply that Ricardian and subsequent poetry (despite their glaring neglect of the fifteenth century, a trait of criticism that persisted up until very recently¹⁵) is largely governed by the same rules of discursive production and reception, where shared regularities of enunciation make understanding (and appreciation) of medieval poetic discourse possible. Sidney's claim is particularly revealing, for he appears to posit language ("our English") as the privileged common ground where communication between the past and the present can transpire. That Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate and even Langland can be understood and even enjoyed in Elizabethan England suggests that English poetry from 1380 to 1600 can be described, using a Foucauldian term, as a single discursive formation (i.e. a collection of verbal texts governed by the same set of rules which are invested with authority by the community that practices them [Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* 23-87, esp. 34-43]). The presence of medieval poetry in early modern England, therefore, is not just material (in the form of artifacts, manuscripts, and books) or ideological (as an imaginary mechanism of legitimizing the nation), but discursive as well: medieval poetry, the early modern theorists seem to imply, is relevant to the production and understanding of literary discourse in Renaissance England. It is indeed one of the premises of this dissertation that in early modern England medieval poetry was involved in the shaping of Renaissance discourse. That is, if the Renaissance partly invented itself by trying to make sense of the medieval presence, then in order for us to understand Renaissance poetry medieval texts need to be brought to bear upon our critical procedures. Consequently, what I seek to do in this dissertation is, to a degree, reclaim the medieval past of early modern Petrarchan poetry and, by engaging it as an interpretive code in my readings of the latter, turn the former into the compelling present of Renaissance Petrarchism.

¹⁵ On the idea of barrenness and inferiority of the fifteenth century in poetic terms, see Cooper, Introduction, and essays in Cooper, Mapstone, and Fichte. It is only recently that the fifteenth century has been reclaimed as a fecund and rich literary historical period.

Petrarchan Displacements

My interest in the contentious medieval/early modern rupture determines the choice of English Petrarchan poetry, predominantly sonnets and sonnet sequences, as the primary object of study.¹⁶ For all the recent revisions in literary, cultural, and social history, Petrarch, as a Latin humanist writer, is still often credited as the originator of the concept (if not the term) of the Middle Ages as an age of cultural and scholarly darkness (*tenebrae*) fundamentally distinct from the modern era (see Mommsen). Moreover, his own vernacular love poetry – despite its profound debt to the Middle Ages¹⁷ – and its overwhelming European influence are taken to mark a radical departure from the medieval past and the birth of a modern poetic voice. The arrival of Petrarchism on England’s shores with Wyatt and Surrey is imagined as the beginning of English Renaissance poetry proper. In an all too frequently invoked passage, George Puttenham in his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) places them among “a new company of courtly makers . . . who hauing trauailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as nouices crept out of the schooles of *Dante, Arioste* and *Petrarch*, . . . greatly polished our rude and homely manner of vulgar Poesie . . . in all imitating very naturally and studiously their Maister *Francis Petrarcha*” (62, 65). Puttenham here establishes Wyatt and Surrey’s radical modernity in contrast to the “rude and homely manner of vulgar [English]” verse while equating the novelty of their poetry with Italian, specifically Petrarchan,

¹⁶ Despite the elusiveness of the concept of Petrarchism (“if in one sense Petrarchism has existed continuously since Petrarch himself, in another sense it never was” [R. Greene, *Post-Petrarchism* 3]), I approach English Renaissance Petrarchan poetry as a diverse and heterogeneous body of texts that can nonetheless be recognized and defined as engaging, in some way of other, the major aspects of Petrarchan poetics: rhetoric (oxymora, antithesis etc.), subject matter (unrequited desire), and form (sonnet). For the instability of Petrarchism as both phenomenon and critical concept, see the crucial discussions by Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire* 4-8, 15-17, 48-54; R. Greene, *Post-Petrarchism* 3-5 and *Unrequited Conquests* 5-6. Kennedy, in *Authorizing Petrarch*, similarly draws our attention to the myriad of ways in which Petrarch’s poetry was read and interpreted in Renaissance Europe, further subverting the idea of Petrarchan imitation as a coherent whole. See also Warley, who demonstrates various internal contradictions inherent in the concept of sonnet sequence (*Sonnet Sequences* 19-44).

¹⁷ Kennedy, for example, characterizes Petrarch’s poetry as “a hybrid of classical and late medieval forms in northern Italy” (*Site* 262; also *Authorizing* 18). See also Forster 2-3; R. Greene, *Post-Petrarchism* 22; Spiller 53. Roche (1-32) locates Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* in the system of medieval ethics.

influence, despite the fact that in sixteenth-century England Petrarch was often considered a medieval writer.¹⁸ Writing four hundred years after Puttenham, William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden identify the Renaissance as the era of modernity with the discovery of individualism, which inevitably leads them to Petrarch and his poetry. As they write, “Petrarchism was in fairly precise ways the distinctive genre of the English Renaissance ... the historical record almost compels us to discuss Petrarchism in terms of the period concept” (158-59).¹⁹

The coupling of Petrarch with the emergence of historical, cultural, and literary modernity is premised, in most cases, on the inception in his texts of individual literary identity, of conflicted and complex interiority – in other words, of “the subject” as we know it, something purportedly absent from medieval poetry.²⁰ The bigger question behind the argument of Petrarch’s invention of modern subjectivity, therefore, concerns the relationship between medieval and early modern selfhood. In somewhat more abstract terms, the question seems to be, is medieval, pre-Petrarchan subjectivity possible at all? For many critics of early modern literature the answer, at least until not long ago, was predominantly negative, although historical trajectories that assign the birth of modern subjectivity

¹⁸ Richard Helgerson cites Roger Ascham, who in *The Schoolmaster* counts Petrarch and Chaucer among medieval authors (“Gothians”), and Samuel Daniel in whose chronology of writers in *A Defence of Ryme* Petrarch is relegated to the darkness of the thirteenth century (*Forms of Nationhood* 306-07 n.5).

¹⁹ See also Braden, *Petrarchan Love* esp. 60-61. Spearing, in *Medieval to Renaissance*, likewise associates modernity with Petrarch’s writings (5-14) and stresses Wyatt’s and Surrey’s poetic endeavours as unprecedented (278-326). See also T. Greene, who discovers in Wyatt’s Petrarchan poems the first instances of genuinely mature humanist – and thus Renaissance – imitation in English poetry (*Light in Troy* esp. 242-47); and Kirkpatrick 126. For an critique of these “distorted” accounts see Simpson, *Reform* 121-90, esp. 148-54; Bryan 5-7.

In England the nexus between the introduction of Petrarchism and the rise of modernity is also reinforced by the Reformation, for as Stephen Hamrick notes, “the Reformation and Petrarchism came to England at the same time” (329). If the Reformation “signals ... the construction of a new religion of inwardness in its place, and the emergence of a new sense of distance from the historical past” (Summit, *Lost Property* 109), Petrarchism does the same for poetry: it introduces a new level of interiority and distances poetic practice from the past.

²⁰ The classical instance of this argument is John Freccero’s essay “Fig Tree.” See also T. Greene, “Flexibility;” Mazotta 58-79. Another work that has to be mentioned here is Joel Fineman’s *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, which despite contrasting Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence with the previous poetic tradition (including Petrarch), still implies that Shakespearean subjectivity which, for Fineman, invents modern selfhood, is indebted to Petrarch (esp. 193). See my discussion of the modernity of the Shakespearean subject in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

(with its concomitant characteristics of inwardness, instability, contradiction, self-interrogation) to the Renaissance have since been dismissed as still perpetuating the Burckhardian view on the rise of individualism.²¹ As Helen Cooper has noted, absence in the literature of the Middle Ages of textual subjects that could be compared with Petrarch or Hamlet or post-Romantic heroes “does not however mean that a sense of subjectivity, of the uniqueness of individual experience as it is registered inwardly, is necessarily absent in the later Middle Ages” but, rather, we are often put off by the “unfamiliarity of the means of representation” (Introduction 11). It has been shown on numerous occasions that many of the techniques of subjectivity that are taken to be essentially modern were available to the medieval world since Augustine’s confessions, and a rich tradition of writing the self existed in literature and poetry from at least the twelfth century on.²² For instance, as James Simpson shows, the purportedly revolutionary Petrarchan identities of Wyatt and Surrey were pre-figured by Ovidian selves found in late fourteenth and fifteenth century English poetry (*Reform* 121-90). This is not to say that historical change in the structures and ideas of subjectivity did not take place. The lesson to be learned from revisiting these debates, I would suggest, is that the line separating the pre-modern subject from the early modern individual is tenuous: understanding historical subjectivity defies ordered chronology and strict periodical demarcation. Internalizing the critique of the early modernists’ blindness towards the rich tradition of medieval subjectivity, Elizabeth Hanson writes,

The various slippages or repetitions that seem to beset the telling of the history of the subject testify to the impossibility of specifying when an epistemic formation is latent or burgeoning or fully achieved, or what its constituent elements are ... at any mo-

²¹ Some acclaimed early modern studies – Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Francis Barker’s *The Tremulous Private Body*, and Catherine Belsey’s *Subject of Tragedy* – locate the origins of the modern subject in the post-Reformation period and hail 1600 as a moment of dramatic transformation in the structures of identity. Barker (one of the recurring objects of subsequent criticism), for example, writes that “[p]re-bourgeois subjection does not properly involve subjectivity at all” (31). Similarly, Belsey’s claims that “[i]n the fifteenth century the representative human being ... has no single subjectivity that could constitute [his] origin; he is not a subject” (18). Perhaps the most incisive critique of the obliviousness of early modern studies towards the complexity and heterogeneity of the Middle Ages is Aers, “Whisper;” see also Gray; Patterson, “On the Margin” esp. 95-101.

²² See, for example, Dronke; Bryan 35-74; S. Kay; Spence; Zink; and Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity* 31-34 for a brief overview.

ment in discourse the subject is situated within a unique, non-systematizable network of material pressures and intellectual filiations. (12)

Just like the changes we associate with the Renaissance and Reformation did not produce immediate and irreversible social, political, scientific, or religious revolutions in Europe, leaving numerous medieval phenomena intact, earlier technologies of subjectivity did not dissipate at any given moment between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century but continued to exist in the warped cultural space.

Additionally, the problem with denying the Middle Ages a place in “the history of the subject” is not only that such a manoeuvre misrepresents the immensely complex and diverse earlier period as unified and stable (against which the early modern must be defined), but also that it deprives Renaissance culture itself of a vital historical dimension – that is, the continuity of medieval forms of discourse and identity whose role in the project of modernity must be acknowledged if we hope to arrive at a more accurate picture of historical change. It is from this angle that my dissertation intervenes into these critical debates. I do not aim to revise the grand narrative of “the history of the subject” or to dismantle the concept of Petrarch as “the first Renaissance man” (although that the persistence of medieval modes of selfhood into the Renaissance inevitably muddles the distribution of the chapters in the history of the subject is one of my attendant claims). Nor do I seek to question the role of Petrarchan legacy in the fashioning of modern selfhood. My argument is rather more local. I maintain that in early modern English poetry Petrarchan subjectivities were often articulated in medieval terms, using the vocabularies of textual identity inherited from the previous centuries. It is far from my goal to claim that Petrarchan poetic subjectivity is in essence medieval, but I do argue that in Renaissance England Petrarchan selfhood was in part configured out of vestiges of medieval poetic identities.

In some ways, my dissertation continues the important work begun some three decades ago of opening the seemingly conventional and monolithic discourse of Petrarchan love to re-readings through the prism of diverse social and cultural contexts of early modern England. Petrarch, William

Kennedy has observed, “could be anything and everything to his readers” (*Site* 3); and indeed as a series of brilliant studies has cogently demonstrated, English Petrarchism reserved for its subjects a profusion of identitarian positions: political (Marotti, “Love;” Jones and Stallybrass), religious (Roche), gendered (Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire*; Estrin; C. Freccero 13-25; Stephens), nationalist (Kennedy, *Site*), colonial (R. Greene, *Unrequited Conquests*), and social (Warley, *Sonnet Sequences*). Yet, these multiple choices for the performance of Petrarchan desire became available to writers largely through a synchronic nexus between the formal strategies of Petrarchism and the sociocultural context of early modern England. What I propose is that earlier forms of selfhood inscribed in poetic discourse also bore a part in this diversification of Petrarchan subjectivity in early modern England, which invites a re-reading of English Petrarchism from a diachronic perspective. Petrarch himself, in the opening lines of the *Canzoniere*, posits disintegration of his self along a temporal axis as the key theme of the collection: “*Voi ch’ascolate in rime sparse il suono / di quei sospiri ond’ io nudriva ‘l core / in sul mio primo giovenile errore, / quand’ era in parte altr’ uom da quell ch’I’ sono*” (“You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of those sighs with which I nourished my heart during my first youthful error, when I was in part another man from what I am now” [1.1-4]). The poet’s self is, in other words, dispersed in time, between the past and the present, the then and the now. As I argue in this dissertation, the textual selves of English Petrarchan poetry are likewise “scattered” in their vernacularity between their medieval past and their early modern present; and my goal is to uncover the role medieval discourses and medieval selves play in early modern Petrarchan poetry.

Theoretical Engagements

My dissertation, building extensively on the modern scholarship that re-connects the medieval and the early modern, at the same time takes a somewhat different approach to reading texts across the lines of literary and historical periods. While the majority of recent studies tends to stress the material presence of medieval culture in early modern England, be it in the form of buildings,

books, monuments, everyday objects, religious, political and social rituals, or institutions, I am more concerned with the symbolic presence of medieval poetry in early modern England. Though I do not wish to ignore the materiality of language, my focus is the endurance of various medieval forms of textual subjectivity (encoded in certain discursive configurations) into the early modern period and their significance for Renaissance articulations of Petrarchan selves. To account for this presence of the medieval within early modern Petrarchan poetry, I deploy an amalgam of various theoretical approaches which – as the sub-title of my dissertation makes clear – I call a “genealogy of poetic discourse.”

The term “genealogy” has an undeniably Foucauldian ring to it, and my debt to Foucault is sizable. Foucault defines genealogy as “studying the constitution of the subject across history which has led us up to the modern concept of the self” (“Beginnings” 202). It is an investigation into the multi-layered constructedness of modern subjectivity, chipping away at its seeming trans-historicity and wholeness, uncovering within the concept of the subject traces of various historically contingent powers. It is not, however, a teleological enterprise: genealogy refuses to seek for origins and focuses, instead, on deviations, errors, and inconsistencies in the realm of historical change. As Foucault writes,

[t]he search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself ... [genealogy’s] intention is to reveal the heterogenous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity. (“Nietzsche” 147)

Genealogy seeks to disrupt rather than consolidate: by discovering a history behind a concept or institution that previously appeared to have none, it destabilizes and complicates by introducing a historical dimension that subverts any notion of natural cohesion.

Following Foucault, I investigate the genealogy of early modern English Petrarchan subjects by uncovering their possible vernacular past. I seek to demonstrate that various forms of Petrarchan

subjectivity in Tudor England are neither without vernacular history (that is, their beginnings precede the moment of transposition of the Italian poetic practice onto English soil), nor are they indicative of a radical departure in the history of English poetry and poetic subjectivity (that is, Petrarchan subjects of the sixteenth century are not necessarily more complex or sophisticated than their medieval counterparts).²³ At the same time, departing from Foucault, I think through the concept of genealogy in a less technical, more quotidian sense, as “an account of one’s descent from an ancestor or ancestors, by enumeration of the intermediate persons,” or an “investigation” into such descent (*OED*). Indeed, for each distinct form of Petrarchan subjectivity this dissertation investigates I suggest the existence of a certain number of vernacular “ancestors” or “intermediate persons” – forms of selfhood found in English poetry that pre-date the early modern structures of identity and have a bearing on the latter. As Jacqueline Stevens writes in her recent critique of Foucault’s use of the term, which she demonstrates to be a violent misreading of Nietzsche, the term “genealogy” suggests

a family tree, a chart recording the mix of choices and events that line up ancestors in a necessary relation to the next generation, telling an implicit causal story about how strata are connected and, ideally, tracing one’s history as far back as possible, the presumption being that these origins carry forth a secret essence manifest in the present ... One traces out a present connection to ancestors because one thinks that this reveals something essential about who one is now, that this past has a value, and that there is something about one’s being now that can be ascertained by knowing one’s origins. (581)

²³ An example of non-genealogical history of subjectivity can be found, for example, in Anthony Low’s *Aspects of Subjectivity*, in which Low surveys changes in the history of the textual subject from *The Wanderer* to Milton. His basic premise is very similar to mine, that “subjectivity and individuality – the sense that an individual human being has his own “insides,” feelings, and identity – go back a long way into the past” (184). I find less convincing, however, his insistence that “the individual’s internal sense of himself began to undergo a critical change of direction about the time of Luther, Shakespeare, Descartes, and Milton” (184), especially considering that Low (yet again) finds in the early modern subject the origins of modernity and postmodernity and connects the emergence of the modern subject with the act of killing the father (98-128) – that is, he sees it as a denial of genealogical connection to the past.

For Foucault, in contrast, the duty of genealogy is “not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes” (“Nietzsche 146). I am, however, equally interested in ruptures and in continuities of discourse. I deploy genealogy of discourse as a form of literary history that attempts to discover how various strata of poetic form and meaning are connected in English poetry, how the medieval past does “actively exist” and “secretly animate” the early modern present. I do that, however, without insisting on teleological development, and without claiming to locate the ultimate origin of a given form of poetic selfhood;²⁴ or to quote Foucault, “not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they are engaged in different roles” (“Nietzsche” 140). What I show is that pre-modern English poetic discourse defies attempts to imagine its history as straightforward, for it contains, at any given moment, traces of the past and clues to the future.

Beyond Foucault, I approach the category of poetic discourse as a kind of historical continuity haunted by symptomatic memories of its anterior otherness, hoping to grasp poetry as an intertextual construction informed by temporality, i.e. sustained by the past practices and articulations which legitimize and shape subsequent poetic performances. The term I use throughout this dissertation is “the memory of discourse,” which I trace to Bakhtin’s philologically-inflected idea of “the objective memory of genre” – “a representative of creative memory in the process of literary development” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 106).²⁵ One of the points of departure for this dissertation is that

²⁴ I leave this work to philosophers: see, for example, Charles Taylor’s magisterial *Sources of the Self*.

²⁵ I also find useful, albeit in a limited way, Foucault’s earlier concept of archaeology. The latter attempts to trace and describe within forms of discourse regularities that govern the production of individual enunciations, simultaneously celebrating discontinuities and ruptures that fully explore the limits of enunciability of a given discourse (see Foucault, *Archaeology* 151-217). As I have already made clear, this dissertation indeed imagines English poetry from 1380 to 1600 as a discursive formation and identifies analogous structures of discourse and subjectivity in the whole field of pre-modern poetry. My choice of genealogy as the primary method, however, is dictated by archaeology’s inability to be a foundation for what is, in essence, a work of literary history. It is through genealogy that I seek to bind Petrarchism to earlier forms of English poetry, which offers a more opportune framework for writing such a history of poetic subjects. On intersections between Bakhtin’s genre and Foucault’s discourse, see Simpson, *Introduction* 15. My understanding of poetic discourse as an intersec-

poetic discourse functions as an accretive institution where the sedimentation of prior forms and meanings, voices and gestures, rather than being lost over the course of time, contributes to the shape of later poetic enunciations.

At the same time, my preference for “discourse” over “genre” (Bakhtin tentatively defines genre as a unity of “thematic content, style, and compositional structure” [*Speech Genres* 60]) is dictated by the desire to overcome the apparent formal difference between early modern Petrarchan poems, predominantly sonnets, and medieval narrative texts – in other words, between lyric and narrative. Perhaps this caveat is superfluous: With the exception of Wyatt’s poems, it must be noted, all the other Petrarchan texts I discuss – Surrey’s *Songes and sonettes*, Mary Stewart’s casket sonnets, Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Spenser’s *Amoretti*, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, and Wroth’s *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* – as sonnet sequences are hybrid forms that combine aspects of both lyricity and narrativity.²⁶ Conversely, the medieval texts I invoke (except for Hoccleve’s *Series*, on which I touch very briefly) – the Mede episode for Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* and *Troilus*, Lydgate’s *Complaynt of Loveres Lyf*, James I Stewart’s *Kingis Quair*, Charles d’Orléans’s lyrics, Hoccleve’s *La Male Regle*, and Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid* – all deal with questions of desire and thus, in many ways, anticipate the Tudor invention of Petrarchan love.²⁷ Nonetheless, it is the category of poetic discourse (rather than genre) that allows for a greater freedom and flexibility in setting medieval and early modern texts against one another while preserving their literary specificity. The closest model for such type of reading that traverses generic boundaries can be found in Simpson’s *Reform and Cultural Revolution*; however, Simpson bases his comparison on the category of

tion of linguistic form, ideology, and subjectivity is also influenced by Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* esp. 3-47.

²⁶ Lyricity and narrativity in early modern Petrarchism is a vexed issue. For some discussions see Dubrow, *Echoes* 28-35; R. Greene, *Post-Petrarchism* 3-21; Grossman 21-5; Neely; Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 9-13.

²⁷ Cf.: “Medieval anthropology defined the subject as desire: as the Augustinian will, with its opposed movements of *caritas* and *cupiditas*; as the Boethian *intentio naturalis* that tends ineluctably towards the *summum bonum*; as the scholastic powers of appetite, in which the intellectual appetite seeks to govern its concupiscible and irascible partners; or as *amor*, an inward sense of insufficiency that drives the Christian self forward on its journey through the historical world” (Patterson, “On the Margin” 100).

poetic “modality” (154), which seems to imply tone and mood, while I seek to stress similarities in the structures of poetic subjectivity.

One can also discern in my theoretical approach echoes of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* – “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating *past* experience, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (*Outline* 82-83, emphasis added). Transferring this notion onto literary terrain, I view poetic utterances in early modern English Petrarchan poetry as “determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production” (Bourdieu, *Outline* 72), that is, pre-configured by medieval poetic texts. Consequently, I read these Petrarchan selves as largely dependent for their successful articulation on the pre-existence of earlier discursive forms of selfhood. I by no means deny the originality and novelty of the Petrarchan subjects one discovers in early modern English poetry, but because they are engrafted onto the vernacular medium, traces of earlier selves preserved in the memory of poetic discourse resonate with new forms of textual identity.²⁸

These earlier forms of discourse and subjectivity, I contend, leave their subtle yet indelible marks upon the vernacular literary imaginary;²⁹ and I take the latter to be a repository of discursive forms and identities available to early modern writers through antecedent and contemporaneous literary utterances, something akin to Thomas Greene’s “rhetorical and symbolic vocabulary, a storehouse

²⁸ In regard to originality and constraint, Bourdieu describes representational practices as caught between repetition and innovation: “Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning” (*Logic* 55).

²⁹ I use the term “literary imaginary” by analogy with “political imaginary,” a phrase that has recently gained currency in critical discourse. It is defined, for example, by Louis Montrose as “the collective repertoire of representational forms and figures – mythological, rhetorical, narrative, iconic – in which the beliefs and practices of Tudor political culture were pervasively articulated” (“Spenser and the Political Imaginary” 907); see also Herman, *Royal Poetrie* 2-3. Unlike Montrose, Herman and others, however, I am more concerned with the potentialities of literary culture that I approach diachronically, i.e. embracing shifts from medieval to early modern, and the role of genre (or discourse) in mapping out these potentialities of poetic utterance.

of signifying capacities potentially available to each member of a given culture” (*Light in Troy* 20). “Imaginary” undoubtedly implies imagination, but the psychoanalytic (Lacanian) overtones in the phrase “literary imaginary” are far from accidental. Lacan associates the imaginary order with the “mirror stage,” in which the child misrecognizes his or her image in the mirror as him- or herself and claims this “ideal ego” as his or her own self, thus assuming “alienating identity” and sowing seeds of future “discord” within the subject (Lacan, *Écrits* 75-81). As Žižek rephrases it, “to achieve self-identity, the subject must identify himself with the imaginary other, he must alienate himself – put his identity outside himself, so to speak, into the image of his double” (104). This assumed “I” (that’s me! the child misguidedly cries), this imaginary identification is founded on mistaking an image for one’s self, misrecognizing it, which means that it will prove to be a source of historical otherness within seemingly unified identity: “[b]uilt up on or out of the loss of itself, [this] identity is defined as its difference from itself” (Fineman, *Subjectivity Effect* 111).

That the self will always include the Other becomes more crucial when the subject moves to the next stage and enters the symbolic order of language, where this alterity of every “I” is exposed even further. As Emile Benveniste wrote, apropos the paradox of subjectivity in language, language is “the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity.” But those are “‘empty’ forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself” (227). Every speaker resorts to the same pronoun “I” in order to express his or her unique subjectivity. It is in this sense that aesthetics and poetics can be described as “the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (Rancière 13). Not only do different poetic identities emerge within the limits of the same poetic form, their diverse subjectivities are frequently articulated through an existing repertoire of verbal, rhetorical, and ideological structures that incorporate the speaker into literary discourse as its subject. These formal structures, Michael Grossman writes, “configure a structural unconscious, opening up a space from which historical agents can selectively employ and manipulate a determined range of rhetorical possibilities to achieve authentically indeterminate results” (16).

Crucially, however, previous speakers have already occupied these forms of expressing subjectivity, which makes them not so “empty” after all. As Bakhtin reminds us, in literature the memory of discourse preserves “others’ utterances and preceding links in the chain” (*Speech Genres* 93), making the presence of past poetic “I”s more palpable than it probably is in everyday speech. New poetic utterances – and new expressions of textual subjectivity – are unconsciously facilitated by past poetic practices. Every poetic subject is thus far from empty but in fact underwritten by his or her historical alterity, by the presence within the limits of his or her “I” of the past subjects that once inhabited the same verbal structures and the same discursive and ideological positionality. Such textual subjectivity is thus a form of mis-recognition of one’s own identity, which is why I insist upon retaining the psychoanalytic charge of the term “imaginary” when I describe my project as an investigation into the medieval contributions to the vernacular poetic imaginary which provides early modern Petrarchan poets with – inescapably alien and alienating – subject positions.

The term “literary imaginary” is also useful because it highlights my lack of interest in exploring conscious influence or purposeful imitation. There were medievalist writers in Tudor, Elizabethan, and Jacobean England whose conscious if conflicted relationship with diverse medieval traditions was a chosen writerly mandate.³⁰ In the works of the early modern poets I study here, however, in Wyatt, Surrey, Mary Stewart, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Wroth, I do not look for signs of conscious medievalism but, rather, seek to unpack the rich overtones of medieval poetry that their vehicle – vernacular poetic discourse – contains, at times suggesting the presence in early modern texts of poetic choices and subject positions that complicate or even undermine their post-Petrarchan projects (what Grossman terms “a structural unconscious” of linguistic and rhetorical forms). Embeddedness in historical tradition is not necessarily predicated on awareness. As Derrida remarks,

³⁰ In using the term “medievalism” I follow Deane Williams (“Medievalism”), who argues for the existence of “medievalism *avante-la-lettre*” in early modern English literature as a mode of writing which “seeks to reproduce, recover, or emulate the quality of a medieval text” and/or “uses or adapts medieval material with the intention of making it new” (214, 226).

a writer cannot not be concerned, interested, anxious about the past, that of literature, history, or philosophy, of culture in general. S/he cannot take account of it in some way and not consider her- or himself a responsible heir, inscribed in a genealogy, whatever ruptures or denials on this subject may be ... Account cannot not be taken, whether one wish it or not, of the past.

Yet, Derrida adds, “this historicity or this historical responsibility is not necessarily linked to awareness, knowledge, or even the themes of history” (*Acts of Literature* 55). One of the most vivid examples of the power of medieval poetry to contravene the direction taken by early modern writers is, as we shall see, Spenser’s *Amoretti* (1595), in which Langlandian connotations of Spenser’s vocabulary (particularly, the word “meed”) threaten to undermine Spenser’s project of subjectivity. This dissertation is not a study of literary influence; it is an exploration into the potentialities and limitations of poetic discourse in which memory of the past becomes an important force in the present.

I find the psychoanalytic dimension of this project instructive in yet another sense. Discussing the role of language in Freud’s theory, Benveniste describes the work of the unconscious as the latent presence in the patient’s discourse of a hidden motivation behind the spoken words, a presence unregistered by the patient but one waiting to be interpreted by the analyst:

Beyond the innate symbolism of language, [the analyst] will perceive a specific symbolism which will be formed, without the subject being aware of it, as much from what is omitted as from what is stated ... He will thus take the discourse as the translation of another “language,” which has its own rules, symbols, and “syntax” and which goes back to the deep structures of the psyche. (67-68)

Psychoanalysis is an inherently hermeneutic project in so far as it attempts to interpret various symptoms in order to uncover a suppressed, untold history; and my task in the following pages is not unlike that of Benveniste’s analyst: what I attempt to do is discern the murmurs of medieval voices within early modern Petrarchan texts. Though subdued, these voices speak in their own language (more accurately, languages) with its “rules, symbols, and syntax,” not necessarily identical with the

language in which early modern Petrarchan poems are written, and often tell their own story. Poetic discourse, by preserving languages and subjectivities of the past in its memory, then becomes a site where historical difference can be appreciated and put to interpretive use.³¹

From this perspective, my engagement with poetic texts across the lines of periods is not only genealogical but hermeneutic as well, in as much as I am concerned with meaning and interpretation, with discovering new ways of reading canonical texts through a dialogue between medieval and early modern poetry. Imbricated within Petrarchan texts, medieval poetics constitutes a powerful interpretive code for both clusters of writing, and reciprocally informed readings have the potential to alter our ways of thinking about the early modern and simultaneously offer an unorthodox reading of the medieval through the prism of Renaissance literary culture. In other words, I move backwards and forward at the same time: I read early modern Petrarchan texts through the prism of medieval poetry – that is, for example, Spenser and Wyatt through Langland, and Sidney and Surrey through Chaucer – yet, as an early modernist, I read, retroactively, medieval poetry through the lens of Renaissance literary culture, when the two groups of poems become each other’s hermeneutic “prejudice.”³² My aim is to expand the interpretive possibilities for both medieval and early modern poetry, underscoring the significance of medieval forms of discourse and subjectivity for our understanding of early modern texts while reiterating, at the same time, the richness of readerly experience that encounters with Renaissance poetry bring.³³

³¹ Cf. “There is no history without iterability, and this iterability is also what lets the traces continue to function in the absence of the general context or some elements of the context” (Derrida, *Acts of Literature* 64). Conversely, repetition-with-a-difference opens possibilities for writing history of the subject (or, more generally, literary history): “Just as the possibility of constructing a story supports our experience of self-identity over time, so the experience of difference within identity, in ourselves and others, supports our ability to read a story” (Grossman 8).

³² For “prejudice” as an inherent and productive foundation of the process of interpretation, in fact, its *sine qua non* which guarantees the enduring relevance of poetic texts across time achieved via a possibility of new readings, see Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (267-304). Gadamer’s book is also critical to my approach because it stresses the vital importance of language as a key form of continuity that allows a culture to sustain its identity despite massive historical change.

³³ This is one of the crucial points where my study diverges from the central argument of Simpson’s *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, to which I am otherwise much indebted. Simpson claims that the development of English literature between 1350 and 1547 can be imagined as a teleological

Chapter Outlines

The argument of this dissertation is quite straightforward, namely, that medieval poetry inscribes in the vernacular literary imaginary a web of rhetorical structures and associated subject positions; and that various linguistic and ideological traces of these medieval discourses and selves are present in early modern English Petrarchism. Articulations of subjectivity in early modern English Petrarchan poetry, I argue, are palimpsestic in that they depend upon medieval structures of discourse, and Petrarchan vocabularies of the self are interwoven in early modern lyric poetry with medieval lexicons of subjectivity. Local ramifications of my argument, however, are more complex as each of the four chapters investigates, genealogically and hermeneutically, a separate form of subjectivity that persists in English poetry from the medieval to the early modern period. Each chapter thus engages with a distinct set of texts and discourses, and the claims each chapter makes focus on specific authors and issues.

Chapter One, “The Langlandian Poetics of Meed in Wyatt and Spenser,” by bringing together the Mede episode from Langland’s dream vision *Piers Plowman* (passūs II-IV), several of Wyatt’s Petrarchan poems, and Spenser’s sonnet cycle *Amoretti*, traces the presence in English literary discourse, from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth century, of a distinct type of textual subjectivity which is produced by the speaker’s competition with his sovereign for a feminine object of desire that allegorizes various kinds of reward (meed). I show that in the Mede passūs of Langland’s poem, Will the dreamer emerges as subject in response to an intense spectacle of the royal court where Mede, a female personification of reward, is tried in order to determine whose legal right it is to control the traffic in meed. Despite being densely populated by characters, the episode is structured around the

movement towards simplification and limitation of literary possibilities: “the institutional simplifications and centralizations of the sixteenth century provoked correlative simplifications and narrowings in literature” (1). Not only do I avoid constructing a grand narrative on the scale Simpson does (a basic difference in the genre of our studies can account for that), but I strive to show, through my bifocal readings, that post-Reformation poetry in fact displays none of the “narrowings” or “limitations” that Simpson speaks about, though I often achieve that by introducing medieval strata of text and meaning. For a critique of this aspect of Simpson’s argument, see Aers and Beckwith 6-9.

rivalry between the king, who plays the main role in administering the circulation of meed in his kingdom, and Will, whose textual strategies betray passion for Mede as an object of sexual, pecuniary, and poetic desire. This triangular intersubjective relationship translates, I argue, into a distinct type of textual performance (the poetics of meed), one poised between courtliness and laureateship, in which one of the mechanisms of courtly love (competing with your sovereign for the same lady) grinds against the office of a poet laureate (legitimizing the institution of royal power), with potentially disastrous consequences for the subject. This creates in the vernacular memory of discourse a deep anxiety regarding the ambivalence of meed and thus the viability of integrating courtly and laureate strategies. I then turn to Wyatt and Spenser in order to investigate identitarian and verbal parallels (for example, the endurance of the words “meed,” “measure,” and “rich”) between the medieval poem and the early modern sonnets. Some of Wyatt’s most famous Petrarchan poems such as “Who so list to hounte,” I argue, imagine a Langlandian scenario of subjectivity produced by a menacing rivalry with the sovereign for an object of erotic and economic desire – a rivalry that is a threat at once to the speaker’s life and to his poetic utterance as well. Langland’s anxiety of meed, I further argue, in subtle ways underwrites the poetic logic of Spenser’s *Amoretti*. The sonnet cycle is constructed in a narrow space between private desire and public passion, between courtly love and laureate ambition, with the speaker seeking to obtain both types of meed, the gift of sexual grace from his lady and the gift of riches and fame from his sovereign. Reading the *Amoretti* through the prism of Langland’s poem, I dissect the futility of the Spenser’s attempts to achieve his goal, for the textual space between courtliness and laureateship is marked with Langlandian uncertainty: the speaker fails at negotiating a hybrid form of writing and the individual projects of courtly and laureate ambition are undone by the cycle’s indeterminate conclusion.

Chapter Two, “Chaucerian Melancholy in Early Modern England: Surrey’s *Songes and Sonettes* and Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*,” explores the ways in which Chaucerian melancholy (exemplified, most explicitly, in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*) operates in two sixteenth century English Petrarchan sequences: the *Songes and sonettes* of Henry Howard, earl of Surrey (that is, the Surrey

section of *Tottel's Miscellany*), and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. Taking as my point of departure Sidney's commendatory remarks in *An Apologie of Poetry* about Chaucer and Surrey, I investigate a vernacular genealogy of Sidney's poetic identity in *Astrophil and Stella* and argue that the lovesick Petrarchan Sidneian subject is pre-figured in English literary discourse by Chaucer's poetics of melancholy, which in turn informs Surrey's Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan experiments in Tottel's collection. The focus of this chapter is the fragmentation of identity precipitated by the work of melancholy. In order to adumbrate the melancholy subject, I read the *Book of the Duchess* (with brief references to Chaucer's *Troilus* and Lydgate's *Complaynt of Lovers Lyf*) in the context of both pre-modern and modern theories of melancholy, from pseudo-Aristotle and Constantine of Africa to Ficino, Elyot, Lemnius, Bright, Laurentius, Ferrand, and Burton to Freud and Kristeva. Melancholy not merely supplies a subject matter for Chaucer's poem but accounts for its textual logic, namely, a splintering of the "I" and its dissolution into a series of quasi-theatrical performances of selfhood. The same mechanism of melancholic fragmentation, I argue, persists in the English vernacular into the sixteenth century: both Surrey's *Songes* and Sidney's *Astrophil* display poetic subjects captured by an endless proliferation of new forms of selfhood that prevents them from coalescing into a stable, coherent identity. Chaucerian melancholy, I further argue, shapes Surrey's and Sidney's relationship with Petrarchism, resulting in an ambivalent form of poetic discourse, where the production of amorous verse is carried out alongside its radical critique. Not only, I suggest, is Sidney's renunciation of Petrarchism genealogically related to Surrey's radical subversion of this poetic model, but both Renaissance poets find the discursive resources for articulating a break with the continental poetic practice in Chaucer's medieval poetics of melancholy. The latter also illuminates the simultaneous disavowal and preservation of Petrarchan discourse in Surrey and Sidney: shattering the structures of Petrarchan discourse and imploding the poetic self, melancholy still preserves them in utterances that follow, which is evident in that neither Surrey nor Sidney is able to leave Petrarchism fully behind. In this they both repeat the trajectory of melancholy writing wrought by Chaucer who, at the end of the *Book of the Duchess*, rebuilds his self out of the ruins of French courtliness which he earlier rejected.

In Chapter Three, “Captive Voices of Desire: the Casket Sonnets and the Poetics of Monarchical Prison Writing,” I turn to the casket sonnets, one of the most enigmatic texts of the English Renaissance. This short sequence comprises twelve Petrarchan poems in French accompanied by crude English translations, printed in 1571 in a pamphlet called *Ane Detectiown of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*. The book attributes the sonnets to Mary Stewart and uses them to furnish its anti-Marian agenda, as incriminating evidence of Mary’s involvement in an illicit love affair with James Bothwell (putative addressee of the sonnets) and possibly in a conspiracy to murder her second husband, Lord Darnley. Though in recent years the casket sonnets have attracted considerable attention from feminist and historicist critics, they have never been considered in the context of Mary’s imprisonment. Meanwhile, printed in 1571, during the early stages of the Scots queen’s imprisonment in England, the casket sonnets articulated a poetic voice that must have been associated with the incarcerated queen. As such, I argue, the casket sonnets can be located in the context of English royal prison writing, a tradition that leads back into the Middle Ages. As a series of love poems of unrequited desire spoken in the voice of an incarcerated sovereign, the sonnets construct a literary subject analogous to the one inscribed in the English literary imaginary by two fifteenth-century poetic texts that figure royal imprisonment, *The Kingis Quair* attributed to Scots king James I Stewart (1394-1437) and a sequence of English lyrics associated with the French Duke Charles d’Orléans (1394-1465), both actual prisoners of the English crown in the first half of the century. My interest, however, does not lie in narrating the similarities in the fate of the three foreign royals incarcerated in England. In all three texts, I contend, one finds various aspects of the same poetic subjectivity: a monarch subjected to the subjects through incarceration; a sovereign whose writing is hijacked by the subordinates and translated out of the native tongue; a ruler subjected to the rule of desire; and a prince submitting to divine authority. While tracing a medieval poetic genealogy of the casket sonnets to James, Charles, Chaucer, and Boethius, I also investigate the connections of the three with a wider cultural context. I argue, through reading them alongside the political ideas of Fortescue, Buchanan, and James VI/I, that the figure of an imprisoned sovereign is a disturbing but powerful ideologeme of

the pre-modern English literary and political imaginary. I conclude with a brief reference to a Petrarchan sonnet from Lady Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, in order to suggest that this form of poetic subjectivity remains a viable literary construction in pre-modern English cultural imagination even beyond the historical body of an imprisoned monarch.

The primary objective of Chapter Four, "The Pathology of Affect in Shakespeare, Hoccleve, and Henryson," is to re-imagine William Shakespeare's sonnets as part of the English vernacular tradition of erotic poetry. Joel Fineman's claim in *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, that in his sonnets Shakespeare invents modern subjectivity by voiding the forgoing poetic praxis, is still tacitly accepted by a majority of critics. I argue, however, that some aspects of Shakespeare's language of the self have antecedents in medieval English poetry, namely, in *La Male Regle* by Thomas Hoccleve and *The Testament of Cresseid* by Robert Henryson. To map this vernacular genealogy I focus on Shakespeare's representation of the desiring subject as afflicted with a debilitating disease of desire beyond the conventional imagery of erotic sickness. Shakespeare creates a form of poetic subjectivity where the ontologically diseased subject emerges out of an ethically questionable emotional attachment to two pathogenic objects of desire. The crisis of succumbing to violent emotional distemper threatens the subject with erasure in both physical and moral terms yet it simultaneously leads him towards a radical self-interrogation about the foundations and limits of identity. Though, as I suggest, Shakespeare's sonnets often articulate their subjectivity in the historically specific medical language of syphilis unknown in Europe until 1494, the disease of love (*morbus venerius*) in the sonnets still remains a powerful trope governed by its own poetic logic. That is, passion and its objects are figured as a moral disease that at once destroys the subject's body and sustains his identity; erotic compulsion is venom and antidote, sickness and health, beauty and ugliness – in other words, *pharmakon*. The figurative aspect of Shakespeare's erotic disease allows us to trace vernacular antecedents of Shakespeare's subjectivity. Pre-dating Shakespeare's sonnets by almost two centuries, Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* similarly investigates the ethical and corporeal anxieties of a lyric speaker whose selfhood is predicated on the experience of pathological affect. Hoccleve's poem represents pathological desire

as at once poisoning and recuperating the speaker's identity, etching upon the literary imaginary a distinct language of the self. Besides, Hoccleve's texts (alongside other medieval begging poems) prefigure the Shakespearean subject in another important respect: as poems involved in patronage, they deploy the figure of a sick and destitute poet-lover as a counterpoint to the ideal of his patron who allegorizes and embodies health and wealth. Shakespeare's textual subject, I argue, in the sonnets which equate his beloved with health and financial reward, proves to be an heir to this scenario of English vernacular poetics. At the same time, Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, a sequel to Chaucer's *Troilus* in which the late medieval Scots poet envisions Cresseid's death from leprosy as punishment for her betrayal of Troilus, investigates another aspect of the poetics of disease. His exploration of the rhetorical and imaginative connections between sickness and femininity (tentatively present in Hoccleve as well) articulate a scenario of subject formation in which the sick feminine body threatens the masculine subject with pollution and erasure even as it remains indispensable to the construction of masculinity. Shakespeare, I contend, re-deploys this model of identity in his sonnets where the dark lady embodying the pox figures as a source of pathogenic desire, which proves crucial for the emergence of the Shakespearean subject.

It is not difficult to notice that in each of the four chapters my investigations into the rhetoric of subjectivity involve excursions into a number of extraneous historical discourses: kingship and royal service, melancholy, imprisonment, disease and the ethics of passion. That is to be expected, for pre-modern subjectivity draws upon many languages in order to articulate itself. As Paul Strohm has phrased it in *England's Empty Throne*, "the medieval (and pre-modern) writer is more likely to deploy the self, not as the ultimate center of interest, but as an imaginative exemplification of broader issues" (143). Indeed every form of poetic subjectivity I examine in this dissertation, be it Langland's self dependent on the gifts of eroticism, money, and possibly death from his sovereign, or Sidney's self written in the language of humoural melancholy, or Hoccleve's self inextricably tied up with the discourse of sickness, displays connections with a wider historical context, emerges as it were in answer to diverse cultural and social pressures. Practicing a genealogy of Petrarchan discourse, then,

entails more than tracing the origins of certain forms of identity to their medieval prototypes; it involves exploring multifarious connections between poetics and history that underlie the whole realm of pre-modern literature. Accordingly, each chapter tells its own local narrative of a specific form of engagement between self and culture, identity and history; and the argument of each chapter has important implications for the specific issue it touches upon, like the history of melancholy or the history of contagious disease. It is only when taken together, however, that these arguments converge upon the central claim of this thesis, namely, that medieval voices underpin Petrarchan discourse in early modern England. This dissertation is an attempt to hear these voices and record them.

Chapter One

The Langlandian Poetics of Meed in Wyatt and Spenser

In his book *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* Robert J. Meyer-Lee mentions the name of William Langland only once, as part of a compressed discussion of the medieval poetic “I” and of those changes in its structure that were precipitated by a transition from the Ricardian to Lancastrian periods in English political and literary history (35-36). The book’s principal object of interest is fifteenth-century English verse “written by an individual whose social identity is at least partly invested in the idea of being a poet in some relation to the English court” (7); and Mayer-Lee makes a strong case for locating in the fifteenth century the origins of the laureate poetics as English literature came to know it in the early modern era. It is thus not at all unexpected that Langland, both chronologically and thematically, should fall outside of the scope of Meyer-Lee’s project, which dwells primarily on the works of Lydgate and Hoccleve. The exclusion does not in any sense cripple this fine book’s argument, but it hinges upon a deep-running critical conviction – a conviction I will seek to question and qualify in this chapter – that Langland, as historical figure and poetic persona, is “definitely divorced from [the court] environment” (Raynder 4), and therefore represents a branch of poetry removed from the arena where princes and men of letters engage in acts of symbolic and monetary exchange, making the author of *Piers Plowman* a resident alien in the realm of court poetry.¹

This position originates in several critical quarters. The poet’s life – meager, speculative, and highly “mythologized” (C. D. Benson, *Public Piers Plowman* 77-82) as the evidence available to us may be – provides no ground for identifying *Piers Plowman* with royal power in any of its manifestations: the poet’s presumed social, cultural, and historical background suggests no professional or literary connection to the court (Hanna 1-24). Next, Langland’s ouster from the company of court poets

¹ See also R. F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers*, where Langland’s name does not appear in connection with court literature of any kind.

is partly founded upon Anne Middleton's influential claim that *Piers Plowman* is an example of "public poetry" – a proto-bourgeois form of secular writing, neither courtly nor purely spiritual nor overtly popular, "defined by a constant relation of speaker to audience within an ideally conceived worldly community" and serving "the common good" ("Public Poetry" 95, 98). While this kind of poetry never sets itself in open opposition to king and court (Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for example, opens with a direct address and dedication to the sovereign), it nevertheless prefers to fare on the centrifugal currents of cultural energy, and in its choice of diction and subject matter disdains deriving its symbolic capital from the seat of power. Middleton's argument parallels the work of literary scholars and historians who believe that Richard II was not interested in literary production that flourished in his kingdom, in stark contrast with Renaissance royal patrons of literary arts. Neither Langland nor his period as a whole, they claim, evinces any association between kingship and literature.²

It is not surprising then that in tracing a genealogy of English poetry written "in some relation to the English court" Meyer-Lee all but ignores the Ricardian period and does not count Langland among those pre-modern poets who charted the course of laureate poetics for centuries to come. Unlike Langland, Thomas Wyatt figures prominently in Meyer-Lee's book (220-32), if only as an anti-laureate – a particularly apt term that I think captures the fundamental traits of Wyatt's verse, which brings laureate poetics into play only to denounce it, and redeploys Lydgate's and Hoccleve's techniques of self-representation by combining them with the strategies of courtly love (226-27). The real hero of *Poets and Power*, however, is Edmund Spenser, who functions as a kind of *point de capiton* for Meyer-Lee's narrative. While never discussed at length, Spenser's self-fashioning as a laureate – a writer who imagines his poetry to be intertwined with the affairs of the commonwealth he lives in and

² John Burrow, introducing the term "Ricardian poetry," argues that the only feature that poets like Chaucer, Langland, and Gower share is a certain autonomy from the royal court (*Ricardian 2*). Several historians (Saul 43; Scattergood 30-31), in turn, insist that Richard and his court were not attracted to literature. For a counter-argument see Bennet 9-12, who offers a somewhat romanticizing view of Richard's court as responsible for the first "golden age" of English letters.

writes for, and therefore is willing to negotiate political and poetic authority – provides Meyer-Lee with a teleological tool to discern retroactively the poetic strategies of earlier authors.³

Like Wyatt, however, Spenser explores throughout his career the possibilities of both laureateship (*The Faerie Queene*) and courtliness (*Amoretti*), a point somewhat neglected by Meyer-Lee, and the heterogeneity of Spenser's poetic personae opens up possibilities for aligning him with writers like Wyatt and Langland, which constitutes my object in this chapter. I want to suggest the existence of a parallel literary genealogy that includes the Mede episode from Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Wyatt's Petrarchan poems, and Spenser's sonnet sequence *Amoretti*. These texts, I submit, draw on the repertoire of laureate poetry and simultaneously utilize the language of courtly love, constructing a different order of discourse and poetic identity. Laureate poetics, the chief object of Meyer-Lee's investigation, focuses on the relationship between a writer and a monarch, whereas courtly love poetry investigates the relationship between suitor and his lady. The texts I am concerned with combine the two, inhabiting an intersubjective triangle formed by a poet, a sovereign, and a courtly lady who facilitates social and economic bonds between the other two, introducing gender difference into the homosocial regime of public poetic service. A fundamental feature of the texts by Langland, Wyatt, and Spenser, I argue, is the deployment of a distinct type of poetic subjectivity constructed by translating the poet's desire to participate in the traffic of women (courtliness) into a form of pecuniary reward – that is, meed – administered by the monarch (laureateship), which results in an ambiguous literary performance drawing on but ultimately undermining both types of poetics. In other words, the speaker in the texts I consider is a laureate trapped within the institution of courtly love, where neither role proves satisfactory to the poetic subject since the two kinds of poetics remain structurally incompatible. This trajectory of texts from Langland to Wyatt to Spenser, I contend, shares a number of important characteristics with both laureate and love poetry, and yet it maintains its own historical and literary specificity, articulating what I tentatively describe as a “poetics of meed.”

³ On early modern laureateship, including Spenser, see Helgerson, *Self-Crowned* 21-100.

Though it is true that in early modern England Langland was recruited by the vernacular imagination predominantly as a proto-Protestant satirical writer,⁴ the identitarian repertoire of *Piers Plowman* is not limited to articulations of social and religious opposition. In fact, the poem is so uncompromisingly multifaceted, encouraging the protagonist of the poem Will to assume such a multitude of identitarian positions, that it is virtually impossible to pinpoint the Langlandian subject in terms other than fragmentation and dispersal.⁵ Langland assimilates an enormous number of literary and non-literary forms and genres, including, as I shall demonstrate, courtly and proto-laureate aesthetics. Neither a courtly poet nor a laureate *sensu stricto*, Langland, I contend, veers between these two modes of discourse in order to construct his poetic subject in the Mede episode of *Piers Plowman*, if only to expose the precariousness of such a hybrid form of identity.⁶ His poem registers in the English vernacular a deep anxiety about the poetry of meed, about writing between the sovereign and the object of desire – an anxiety, I argue, that endures in discursive memory into the early modern period, where it is reactivated in the densely laureatized Petrarchism of Wyatt and Spenser.

It could be deduced from the foregoing paragraphs that I read Langland retroactively, through the prism of the two Tudor poets. That is correct, although more immediately my project is genea-

⁴ The two sixteenth-century texts that inaugurate *Piers Plowman*'s place in the English canon, Robert Crowley's two 1550 editions of *The Vision of Piers Plowman* and George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), albeit from different cultural and political angles, both emphasize the poem's detachment from courtly aesthetics. For Crowley, *Piers Plowman* is a proto-Protestant dream vision, a polemical text which "doth most christianlie enstructe the weake, and sharplye rebuke the obstynate blynde. There is no maner of vice, that reyneth in anye estate of man, whyche thys wryter hath not godly, learnedly, and wittilye, rebuked" (*The Vision of Pierce Plowman* *ii). For Puttenham the poem is written in the genre of "Satyr," an essentially anti-courtly form, and its author, who "seemed to haue bene malcontent of that time," clearly unworthy to stand alongside the best examples of polished courtly verse (64-65). Crowley embraces Langland while Puttenham denounces him (see Norbrook 70-71), yet their argumentation is all but identical: both think of *Piers* as satire and both deny the text any connection with the court. On perception of Langland's poem in early modern England, see Kelen. For Crowley's editions, see Hailey; M.R. Jones 116-32; King, *English Reformation* 319-39; Norbrook 36-37; L. Scanlon, "Langland;" Thorne and Urhart.

⁵ For discussion of Langland's pluralistic subject(s), see Lawton's "Subject;" and also C. D. Benson, *Public Piers Plowman* 14-24. For a critique of Lawton's reading and a different approach to the instability of Langlandian selfhood see Tolmie, "Book" esp. 342-44.

⁶ Of course Langland, like many other Middle English poets, does not claim to himself the title of a poet in the modern (or even *early* modern) sense and displays a stunning disregard for intricacies of poetic craft (in contrast to Chaucer, for example); however, there is much to be gained by approaching *Piers Plowman* hermeneutically, through the lens of later theories of poetic identity.

logical in the sense that I read Wyatt and Spenser through Langland, medievalizing, as it were, the texts of both Petrarchan poets. A case for Wyatt's medievalism is not hard to make. Extolled as the "first great English Petrarchan,"⁷ he is at the same time condemned as incorrigibly medieval, as but a hopelessly "drab" writer barely "escaping from the late medieval swamp" (Lewis 222-30), a poet whose texts are downright devoid of "the slightest trace of poetic activity" and bear no sign of the new poetry to come under Elizabeth (H. Mason 171). These polar statements diagnose one of the cruxes of Wyatt scholarship, that is, an uneasy co-existence of "the two elements in Wyatt's poetry, the original and the imitative, the native and the foreign" (Rees 15; cf. H. Mason 145; Evans 65, 70; G. Waller, *English Poetry* 114-15) – in other words, the Petrarchan/Renaissance and the English/Medieval – which pegs the history of Wyatt's criticism as "a sequence of disagreements about the relative values of the different kinds of poetry he wrote, each kind enjoying critical approval for a time, only to be overthrown by a change in taste" (Friedman 137). Indeed, while for Lewis and Mason Wyatt's medievalism is a flaw, others view it as a sign of accomplishment, a faithful adherence to the "plain" style of earlier poets (Thomson, *Thomas Wyatt* 111-48; Peterson 87-119). Inversely, those insisting on the superiority of Wyatt's Petrarchan verse would prefer to see his ties with English medieval poetry severed altogether: from this perspective, Wyatt in his Petrarchan verse "was deliberately breaking new ground in a direction where he could expect no guidance from the literary past of his own country" (Lever 15; cf. Southall 13; Heale, *Wyatt* 70). Seeking a way out of this medieval/early modern divide, I suggest that Wyatt's medievalism is embedded in his Petrarchism (and vice versa), in the sense that his Petrarchan poems, through medieval vernacular lineage, deploy a Lang-

⁷ The phrase is from Dasenbrock (19), but such sentiment has a long history. Prior to Puttenham (see my Introduction above), as early as 1542, in a Latin elegy on the death of Wyatt "Naeniae in mortem Thomase Viatiequitis incomparabilis" the London antiquary John Leland compared the dead poet to Dante and Petrarch: "Beautiful Florence of Dante justly boasts, / And kingly Rome approves the excellence / Of Petrarch's songs. In his own tongue as worthy / Our Wyatt bears the palm of eloquence" (Transl. in Muir, *Life* 262-69 [264]). Wyatt's debt to Italian poetry has since been a recurring theme in accounts of the English Renaissance (see Berdan 456-60; Evans 61, 71; Waller, *English Poetry* 90).

landian structure of poetic subjectivity, one found in the Mede episode of *Piers Plowman*.⁸ Wyatt's Petrarchan poems engage with the Langlandian problematics of meed, imagining a writerly space between courtliness and laureateship and probing the social and poetical connotations of reward.

If Wyatt's medievalism is a deplorable fallacy, Spenser's interest in vernacular tradition is, on the contrary, one of the defining characteristics of his poetic ambition. Among Spenser's literary interlocutors, Langland occupies the privileged position, with *Piers Plowman* viewed as a formal, axiological, and identitarian model for Spenser's "continued Allegory, or darke conceit" of *The Faerie Queene* and other poems.⁹ One of the few exceptions to this compulsive dialogue with the medieval appears to be Spenser's 1595 Petrarchan sonnet sequence *Amoretti*, published by the London printer William Ponsonbie in an octavo book together with a small group of playful Anacreontics and a wedding song, *Epithalamion*. The collection, arguably celebrating Spenser's courtship of, and betrothal to, an Elizabeth Boyle, supposedly stands apart as a work that gestures exclusively in the direction of continental poetic and ideological practices, from *dolce stil nuovo* to Italian and French Petrarchism and Neo-Platonism. Dasenbrock sums up Petrarchism's leading role in the drama of the *Amoretti* when he argues that "Spenser is truer to Petrarch than any Petrarchan before him" (50).¹⁰ As I hope to show, however, Spenser's most Italianate work is simultaneously one of his most vernacular-inflected texts, densely predicated upon Langlandian legacy. It is in the Langlandian poetics of meed that Spenser discovers a mode of discursive representation for the dilemma he has to face late in his poetic career, namely, an unsettled conflict between laureateship and courtliness. Unraveling the threads of Langlandian intertext in the *Amoretti*, I will argue that the dream of Mede, rhetorically and themati-

⁸ Additionally, I seek to problematize the view that of all Wyatt's vernacular precursors Chaucer is the one medieval author whose dialogue with Wyatt deserves critical attention (see Foxwell 52-58; D. Kay, "Wyatt;" Cooper, "Wyatt and Chaucer"; Watkins, "Canonization"). The link between Wyatt and Chaucer also originates in the sixteenth century, in the earl of Surrey's elegy on Wyatt's death, "W. resteth here," where Wyatt is hailed as the new national author who "reft Chaucer of his wit" (*Richard Tottel's Songes and Sonettes* 35.14).

⁹ On Langland and *The Faerie Queene* see Hamilton; Anderson; Paxson; Fowler; on Langland and *The Shepheardes Calender*, see King, *Spenser's Poetry* 14-46; Little.

¹⁰ See, for example, R. Benson; Braden, "Pride;" Gibbs 139-74; Hardison; Kennedy, *Authorizing* 195-280; Lever 104-13; Prescott.

cally, haunts Spenser's Petrarchan poems, resulting in a subversive texture of repressed Langlandian desires which control the development of the sequence as well as the scenarios of individual sonnets.

Lady (as) Meed: The Traffic in Women in *Piers Plowman* II-IV

Piers Plowman is an allegorical dream vision that traces the oneiric journey of a character named Will, the primary enunciating "I" of the poem, through a labyrinth of social and intellectual spaces of the late medieval world, from the lows of a local pub to the highs of a royal court. Amid the pastoral setting of the Prologue ("In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne / I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep weere" [Pr. 1-2]¹¹), the narrator falls asleep and sees, between a "tour" (tower) and a "dungeon," a "fair feeld ful of folk" that represent estates and vocations of Langland's England (Pr. 20-111; 211-31). A king enters the stage and a kingdom is set up amid a controversy over the limits of monarchical power (the fable of rats and a cat [Pr. 146-210]). In passus I, a figure of authority appears, "a louely lady of leere in lynnyn yclothed" (I. 3), who introduces herself as "Holi chirche" and explains to Will what his vision signifies: the castle (tower) is the seat of truth while the dungeon is inhabited by "a wight that Wrong is yhote, / Fader of falshede" (I. 63-64). Will is fascinated with the notion of truth but lacks a natural understanding thereof, which at the onset of passus II prompts him to try the opposite investigative strategy: "Kenne me by som craft to knowe the false," he asks Holy Church (II. 4). Instead of simply being taught about the false, however, Will is shown Mede, the daughter of False, who is about to be married – apparently incestuously – to "oon Fals Fikel-tonge, a fendes biyete [fiend's offspring]" (II. 41), and Holy Church, suggesting that Will should see the opprobrious ceremony with his own eyes, departs, albeit not without a warning against the "coveitise of Mede" (II. 51). Yet the wedding is soon unceremoniously interrupted by Theology who claims that this marriage is unlawful because Mede is betrothed to Truth, not False. To resolve

¹¹ All references are to Langland, *Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt.

this predicament it is decided that Mede and her retinue should travel to London to appear before the King (II. 135-88).

In passus III the King's trial of Mede commences, where she is accused of choosing the wrong husband ("Unwittily, womman, wrought hastow ofte; / Ac worse wroghtes thow nevere than thow Fals toke" [III. 106-07]), yet she is promised pardon provided she agrees to marry Conscience, one of the king's courtiers, to which Mede readily assents (III. 108-13). Conscience, in contrast, is unwilling to accept Mede and bemoans her presence in the land: woe to the realm where the King loves Mede, he exclaims ("Ther she [Mede] is wel with the kyng wo is the reaume" [III.153]). Whereas Mede argues that her existence allows the state as a conglomerate of masters and subjects to operate through a series of reciprocal exchanges of material rewards – and the King seems persuaded by her claim that "No wight, as I wene, withouten mede may libbe!" (III. 227) – Conscience is adamant that "there are two manere of Medes," "that oon God of his grace granteth" and "another mede mesurelees, that maistres desireth" (III. 231-32, 246), conflating a political controversy about the role of money and a debate about semantics.

In the opening lines of passus IV, the King abruptly breaks off the dispute about the propriety of receiving meed and demands that Conscience obey him and accept Mede as wife – an order Conscience opposes vigorously. Reason is recruited to persuade him, but the focus of the episode shifts to Peace's complaint against Wrong (IV. 47-60). Mede interferes on behalf of Wrong and pleads with the King for clemency, but to little avail: the King is implacable in his intent to prosecute him (94-148); and Mede is branded a whore ("the mooste commune of that court called hire an hore" [IV. 166]) and proclaimed a threat to the legal and moral stability of the kingdom ("Mede overmaistereth Lawe and mucche truthe letteth" [IV. 176]). She quietly vanishes from the text, presumably leaving the King and his kingdom governed by Reason and Conscience (IV. 177-95). The passus ends, and as the next one begins the dreamer awakens, chagrined that he "ne hadde slept sadder [more soundly] and yseighen moore" (V. 4).

Although the episode draws upon a variety of discourses – theology, kingship, law, and family among them¹² – its focus is the complex problematic of meed, whose circulation determines the ideological and poetic strategies of the section. The society of *Piers Plowman*, Mede claims, is organized around meed:

‘Emperours and erles and alle manere lordes
Thorough yiftes han yomen to yerne and to ryde.
The Pope and alle prelates presents underfongen
And medeth men hemseluen to mayntene hir lawes,
Servaunts for hire servyce, we seeth wel the sothe,
Taken mede of hir maistres, as thei mowe acorde.
Beggeres for hir biddinge bidden of men mede.
Mynstrales for hir myrthe mede thei aske.
The Kyng hath mede of his men to make pees in londe.
Men that [kenne clerkes] craven of hem mede.
Preestes that prechen the peple to goode
Asken mede and massepens and hir mete [alse].
Alle kynne crafty men craven mede for hir prentices.
Marchaundise and mede mote need go togideres:
No wight, as I wene, withouten Mede may libbe.’ (III. 213-27)

Kings and beggars, lords and minstrels, prelates and craftsmen, everyone gives and receives Mede.

As this passage suggests, no sphere of social reality, neither jurisprudence nor commerce nor institutionalized religion nor trade, can operate successfully without Mede.

¹² Langland’s idea of good government and Mede’s threat to it is discussed in Baldwin 22-54. See Tavormina 1-47 and Keller for the problematic of marriage in the poem; and Stokes 99-156 for discussion of law and justice. For a useful overview of the episode’s theological issues, see Simpson, *Introduction* 37-60.

As an allegory, Mede personifies various kinds of reward, just and unjust (Burrow, “Lady Meed;” Fichte), as well as worldly riches and the sin of covetousness, making the episode an example of medieval venality satire (Yunck 1-13; 284-306). As guests at her wedding point out, she is “ymaried more for her goodes / Than for any virtue or fairnesse or any free kynde” (II.76-77). At the same time, while composed primarily in economic terms, the quoted passage is also imbued with sexual innuendos because Mede’s gender is tightly woven in the fabric of communal life. With Langland the genders he chooses for his allegorical characters “are not casual ... [but] each choice he makes becomes significant in a way that the compulsory feminines of the classical and continental counterparts are not” (Cooper, “Gender” 34). All those who exchange Mede, one of the few female personifications in the poem, are men while she, a woman, circulates between them, facilitating social interaction and strengthening male homosocial bonds. It has thus become somewhat of a critical *locus communis* that the episode epitomizes the traffic in women – “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (Sedgwick 25-26; see also Rubin). In Clare Lees’s formulation, the chief function of Mede is that of an object, facilitator, product, and linguistic sign of such traffic. Unable to exchange commodities herself, she is “always in the middle, sandwiched between Fals and Favel, Symonye and Cyuyle, Conscience and the King ... She is the quiet and passive centre of a veritable storm of masculine activity that passes her from father to father, spouse to spouse, the fair field to the London courts. Every man wants Mede...” (122; see also Aers, “Class;” Fowler 95-133; Murphy; Robertson). False, as both her fiancé and her father, may single-handedly enact the utmost form of the traffic between fathers and husbands, but a host of other men – Favel, Simony, the King, Reason, Guile and Liar, scholars and clerks at the King’s court – all frantically lay their hands on Mede (or hope to do so) as a way to solidify the social bonds within their gender-exclusive group. Regardless of whether they espouse or spurn Mede, they seek to control her.

There seems to be no question that trafficking in Mede, in accord with Gayle Rubin’s model, strengthens the homosocial bonds between those who participate in it. For example, exchanging Mede

helps to overcome, to an extent, social distinction: present at her wedding are “Off alle menere of men, the meene and the riche. / To marien this mayde was many man assembled, / As of knyghtes and of clerkes and oother commune peple” (II. 56-58). One of the problems with this “traffic in women” concept, however, is that, as Karen Newman’s notes, it “assumes untroubled, unified subjects exchanging women/objects” (47). Meanwhile, the men of *Piers Plowman* are anything but unified, untroubled subjects that methodically traffic in a female object, and their continuum is far from being socially homogeneous or unbroken.

To begin with, those involved in giving and receiving rewards are hierarchically organized according to their power to control Mede, from King down to beggar; and while all men in the kingdom seem to depend on Mede, their impact on the forms and channels of this exchange is hardly comparable. The ultimate authority to regulate the traffic in Mede is reserved for the King, who directs the order and duration of her possession by other members of the community. To determine whom Mede is to marry, the whole party has to relocate to Windsor, where “lawe is yshewed” (II.135). This is a historically accurate legal move, for in late fourteenth century the Crown rather than the Church had primary jurisdiction over matrimonial cases (Tavormina 29-30). Upon Mede’s arrival, the monarch immediately takes the matter into his own hands: “I shal assayen hire myself and soothliche appose / What man . . . hire were levest” (II.5-6). Mede herself places monarchs at the head of a catalogue of givers and receivers of meed quoted above: “It bicometh a kyng that kepeth a reaume / To yeue [men mede] that meekly hym serveth” (III. 209-10). The final event of the episode, in which the King, growing annoyed with Mede’s presence in the realm and her pernicious influence on the laws of his kingdom, banishes her (IV.175-80), likewise goes to show that it is the monarch who has the final say in the business of Mede.

This of course does not exclude a possibility of resisting the King’s will, as Conscience demonstrates when he rejects the marriage proposed by the King, but what is important here is that the limits of the King’s power over Mede are tested and determined in a legal setting, as a case before

the royal court. The King's control over Mede is posited as contestable in legal terms, as the result of negotiation and jurisdictional distinction rather than an inalienable right. Given Mede's association with money and wealth, there may be echoes in these scenes of the 1376 and 1377 parliamentary indictments of Edward III's mistress Alice Perrers whose wealth was accumulated predominantly through gifts from the king and who was banished from the royal household by an act of Parliament in 1377.¹³ The last years of Edward III's reign were ravaged by scandals of bribery and corruption among the king's closest advisors, as well as by extreme amounts of spending and disastrous monetary policies (see Ormrod 30-36). Many of these problems – financial, political, and ethical – persisted into the years immediately following the ascension of young Richard II in 1377; and as post-depositional accounts of his reign insist, his faults likewise included the love of excess, enormous expenditures, cupidity, and pride (C. Fletcher 45-59, 74-96; Given-Wilson 71-146). Equally apposite to Langland's depiction of legal debates over the limits of royal authority appears the hotly contested jurisdictional question of royal prerogative. This issue came to the forefront during Richard II's reign, when Wycliffe's ideas provided the Crown with an argument that the clergy should not have temporal power. Additionally, the crown continued to increase jurisdictional authority by extending its prerogative over a growing number of crimes and sources of revenue (see Harding 263-71; S. Walker 139-153).

Further, the continuum engendered by the traffic in meed is ruptured by violence. When Langland's King demands that False and Favel be apprehended (II. 189-205), he is quick to declare that an imminent death awaits them:

‘Now, by Cryst!’ quod the Kyng, ‘and I cacche myghte
Fals or Favel or any of hise feeris,
I wolde be wroken of tho wrecches that wercheth so ille,
And doon hem hange by the hals and alle hem maynteneth.

¹³ On Alice Perrers's career see Given-Wilson 142-46; F.G. Kay; on her significance for *Piers Plowman*, see Clopper 130-32; Trigg, “Medieval Women.”

Shal nevere man of this molde meynprise the leeste,

But right as the lawe loke[th], lat falle on hem alle. (II. 193-98).

Likewise, Conscience's noncompliance with the King's orders places the courtier in grave danger, although he resists the match anyway: "'Nay, by Cryst!' quod Conscience, 'congeye me rather! / But Reson rede me therto, rather wol I deye'"(IV. 4-5). Since this violence ensues from the King as embodiment of law, we are in the presence of sovereign violence, which Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* characterizes as "the originary structure in which [sovereign] law refers to life and includes it in itself by suspending it ... an abandonment [of the subject] to an unconditional power of death" (28, 90). In both cases, however, the scope of violence does not seem to fit the offence – avoiding a marriage arranged by the king or illegally marrying a king's ward.¹⁴ Why is such violence required to regulate Mede's marital affairs?

There appears to be no single answer to this question. It is not unreasonable to posit this violence as a historically specific phenomenon, citing for example Mark Bloch's classical statement in the *Feudal Society* that in medieval Europe "violence became the distinguishing mark of an epoch and a social system," including its economy, laws, and manners (411), a notion reinforced by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* which contrasts the pre-modern barbarity of physical violence to the soft disciplinary power of modernity. Medieval violence "is deployed, not outside the rule of law, but as a policy of those in power, those who claim legitimacy in the practices of governance" (Haidu 25). In England in the fourteenth century the rulers "had the power to divide others who threatened the body politic with division" (Binski 66; cf. Foucault, *Discipline* 28-29). Richard II, for example, not only entertained the idea of classifying those who attacked the royal prerogative as traitors who deserved death (Harding 267), but made the subject's obedience to royal will one of the cornerstones of his political theory (S. Walker 140-41). Langland's King appears to be on the same wavelength when he threatens with hanging (the most common form of execution in medieval England [Hanawalt 38,

¹⁴ Baldwin speculates that Mede's blood relationship to the King (she "myghte kisse the kyng for cosyng and she wolde" [II. 133]) may explain his disproportionate reaction (33).

44]) those who question his right to control Mede as woman and revenue (False and Favel) or choose to oppose his will (Conscience). At the same time, in late medieval England capital punishment was not as frequent as we tend to think; and as Robert Mills suggests in *Suspended Animation*, the penal violence that permeates many medieval literary texts is, among other things, an ideologically formative strategy, a construction of political and legal authority by the culture's imaginary rather than a reflection of the historical processes (7-22). The reigns of Edward III and Richard II saw more violence against the monarchy and nobility in the shape of revolt and resistance than sovereign violence directed at the subjects (see Valente esp. 163-207). In this regard, keeping in mind the didactic character of Langland's text, we might think of the King's violence against those who subvert his control of meed as a fiction of the ideal political order that severely punishes undue reward and excessive wealth ("mede mesurelees").

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the allegorical dimension of this violence. Gordon Teskey, for example, argues that violence is inherent in the genre of allegory, both in the process of repressive allegorical signification that seeks to impose narrative order on the chaos of semantic heterogeneity (esp. 1-31), and in the form of political allegorical violence that converts bodies in a public forum (agora) – of which the King's trial is a useful example – into "allegorical signs," subjecting them "to an inscrutable violence on which the power of the state depends utterly" (136). The violence of Langland's King then provides an acceptable, palatable allegorical disguise for the foundational forms of brutal force. But what force? Perhaps it is the ritual, sacrificial violence that, as René Girard claims in *Violence and the Sacred*, underlies the structures of kingship and is channeled into the system of penal retribution. On the other hand, Mede's marriage is likely to be incestuous, with False named both Mede's father ("For Fals was hire fader that hath a fikel tonge" [II. 25]) and her fiancé ("And now worth this Mede ymarried to a mansed shereve, / To oon Fals Fikel-tonge, a fendes biyete" [II. 40-41]), so consequently the King's violent ban on False's marriage to Mede becomes the "fundamental or primordial law, the one where culture begins in opposition to nature ... the law of the prohibition of incest" (Lacan, *Ethics* 66-67), which takes the form of the violent letter

of the law painfully inscribed over the subject's body. To continue with the psychoanalytic model, this violence aimed at the other participants in the traffic in meed can be linked to the Freudian notion of desire – not the desire to have the object but the desire to be the one who has it. As Borch-Jakobsen (89-91) has suggested, such configuration – personified in the exchange of Mede where the process threatens to erase distinction between men – leads to a conflation of self and other, with the other usurping the place of the self, and subsequently to the necessity to differentiate, often violently, self and other. More abstractly, as Derrida notes in *The Gift of Death*, “it is only on the basis of death, and in its name, that *giving* and *taking* become possible” (44), so this violence may be inscribed in the very category of “meed.” The explanations these theories offer are partial at best, however, and I am thus more interested in the ramifications of this violence rather than its origins. Whether historical or otherwise, the sovereign violence in Langland's poem, I suggest, carves out a textual space where involvement in the traffic of Mede/meed threatens the subject with annihilation – the space that reappears, as we shall see, in the writings of Wyatt and Spenser.

Finally, the homosocial continuum between men in the Mede episode is endangered by a rivalry that plays out between the monarch and his subjects. Though Langland's monarch legitimizes and de-legitimizes the circulation of Mede in his kingdom, he is himself captured by this machinery of sexual and economic desire: even as he assumes a position outside the process of exchange, he remains part of it as a player with vested interest. Kings are not immune to Mede's allurements: “Your fader,” Conscience reminds the King, “she felled thorough false biheste” (III.127); and though this historic reference is unclear it establishes an important connection between royal pecuniary appetite and Langlandian desire of meed. In her turn, Mede, alluding to a recent French military campaign, points out that “In Normandie was [the King] noight noyed for my sake” and “Mede maketh hym [i.e. the King] biloved and for a man holden” (III. 189; 212). The words of Mede, who conflates money with sexuality and military prowess, implicate the King with herself, making his military successes and masculinity appear contingent upon his involvement with Mede.

But if the King is sexually attracted to Mede, so are the others, and while the King may have to compete for her with the likes of False, Favel and others all across the social ladder, his primary rival is Will the dreamer. Will's role in the episode is ambivalent. Despite his position at the periphery of this male activity, he is one of the key participants in this gendered traffic of Mede. He is the one who constructs Mede as an object of desire for the others, including the King. Indeed, in characterizing Mede, Langland dwells on several traits, but none so persistently as her association with carnal desire (e.g. "She maketh men mysdo many score tymes. / [...] / "Wyves and widewes wantounesse techeth, / And lereþ hem lecherie that loveth hire yiftes" [III. 123, 125-26]; "She blesseth these bisshopes, theigh [i.e. though] thei be lewed" [III. 149]; she is "[a]s commune as the cartwey to [knaves and to alle] – / To monkes, to mynstrales, to meseles [i.e. lepers] in hegges" [III.132-33]). Mede's identification with lust and erotic pleasure, however, is by no means an intrinsic quality. Men surrounding Mede do not so much respond to her sexuality as they invest her with desirability. And nobody is more directly liable for this than Will, for Mede is "produced in answer to the male dreamer's *desire* ... [she is] the product of male fantasy" (Aers, "Class" 67, 69; cf. Lees 119, 123; Murphy 149). Specifically, it is Will's fascinated gaze directed at Mede at the beginning of passus II that ushers desire into the network of interpersonal relations of the text, unleashing the subsequent erotic exploitation of Mede's image.

In the opening lines of passus II Langland stages a quasi-cinematic *mise-en-scène* of erotic gazing which ingeniously transforms the space of a theological debate between Will and Holy Church into a field of vision and imposes upon the players the sharply defined roles of a male desiring subject-viewer (Will) and a female object of sight and sexual desire (Mede):¹⁵

I loked on my left half as the lady me taughte,
 And was war of a womman wonderliche yclothed –
 Purfiled with pelure, the puereste on erthe,

¹⁵ A classical analysis of this scenario is Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure." On the role of gaze in the genesis of desire in medieval literature, see Gaunt; Stanbury; D. E. Stewart.

Ycoronouned with a coroune, the Kyng hath noon bettre.
 Fetisliche hire fyngers were fretted with gold wyr,
 And theron rede rubies as rede as any gleede,
 And diamaundes of derrest pris and double manere saphires,
 Orientals and ewages envenymes to destroye.
 Hire robe was ful riche, of reed scarlet engreyned,
 With ribanes of reed gold and of riche stones.
 Hire array me ravysshed; swich richesse saugh I nevere.
 I hadde wonder what she was and whos wif she were. (II. 7-18)

The ostensibly apocalyptic imagery of this description is densely packed with other connotations crucial to our understanding of the dynamic of the episode. By emphasizing the richness of her dress (“Hire robe was ful *riche* ... with ribanes ... of *rich* stones ... swich *richesse* saugh I nevere”) and the cost of the stones that adorn it (“diamaundes of derrest pris”), Langland equates Mede with material wealth. At the same time, as Holi Chirche fears, Will’s response to this spectacle will be “coveitise of Mede” (II. 51), and here Langland is banking on the ambiguity of the word which amalgamates desire for material possession with sexual lust. While desiring her riches, Will simultaneously desires Mede’s body. That Langland’s description focuses on Mede’s clothes and jewelry rather than her naked body, that Langland dresses Mede up instead of undressing her, does not diminish the erotic charge of her portrait. On the contrary, the precarious status of nudity in medieval culture as a site of extreme shame rendered the adorning of female bodies with clothes and accoutrements a poetic vehicle equally, if not more, sexually powerful than undressing them is in our culture (see E. J. Burns; Peter Miller). Veils of textual exuberance wrap Mede up in layers of clothes and accessories, stimulating the erotic fantasy of the dreamer and his readers.¹⁶

¹⁶ Mede’s expensive attire also signifies her class, marking her as socially superior to Will, which may translate into his sexual desire. As James Shultz has demonstrated (17-28, 80-83), heroes of medieval romances fall in love with women not because the latter are differentiated morphologically along the lines of sex, but because of the nobility – expressed through dress – of their courtly bodies.

Meanwhile, the dreamer's "coveitise" is produced through an act of looking at Mede, which makes it a likely instance of *concupiscentia oculorum* ("covetousness of eyes"). Although A. C. Spearing (*Poet as Voyeur* 6) remarks that in medieval culture the latter is normally linked with avarice rather than sexual desire, it would be precipitate to ignore the visual eroticism of Mede's description. As part of the dowry, Mede is to receive "the lordshipe of Leccherie ... / As in werkes and in wordes and in waitynges with eighes, / And in wenynges and in wisshynges and with ydel thoughtes" (II.89-91). She is thus endowed with an ability to arouse desire through ocular perception, to which Will here seems to fall prey. Elsewhere in the poem, he confesses that he is familiar with this particular form of engendering desire: "For I was ravysshed right there – for Fortune me fette / And onto the lond of longynge and love she me broughte" (XI. 8-9). As we soon learn Fortune is followed by "two faire damyseles: / *Concupiscencia Carnis* men called the eldere mayde / And Coveitise of Eighes ycalled was that oother" (XI. 12-14). According to Anne Middleton, encrypted in these lines is one of Langland's anagrammatic authorial signatures ("Kinde Name" 42-54). Yet the bracketing of "love," "longing" and "Will" opens up possibilities for interpreting the speaker as a subject of visual desire, as a lover pining for Mede in the land of erotic longing ruled by the protean goddess. By the same token, Will's act of looking at Mede combines intellectual aspirations (his wish "to knowe the false") and sexual longing, for in the Middle Ages the faculty of sight was "both a tool for the acquisition of *knowledge*, and a locus of carnal *desire*" (Biernoff 17). It is also useful to remember that semantically, sexual desire (and possibly even penile tumescence) is embedded in the name "Will" – an allegorical concept that inhabits a semantic arc from the lowest types of carnal desire to the highest form of rational appetite, further implicating Will in the lust for Mede.¹⁷

The lines that record Will's reaction to this spectacle – "[h]ire array me rauysshed; swich riches saugh I nevere / I hadde wonder what she was and whos wif she were" (B.II.17-18) – are es-

Indeed, Will's description of Mede is sex-neutral; none of the body parts or items of clothing is specifically female. Rather, her dress is suggestive of high social class, which likely functions as an aphrodisiac for Will.

¹⁷ On associations between "Will" and various types of desire in Langland's poem, see Paxson, "Gender" 91-92; Simpson, "Power" 155-59; Zeeman, *Discourse* 64-108.

sential to our understanding of how Will's subjectivity is produced. Describing his excitement with the seen, not the *unseen* beneath Mede's dress (he is ravished by her "rich" clothes, not her physical shape), these lines further blend the erotic and the economic aspect of the figure of Mede. The passage also places Mede within the discourse of marriage – that is, economy, gender difference, and sexuality. As Isabel Davis has recently suggested, many sections of the poem betray anxiety, even guilt about married heterosexual intercourse (29-37); and these lines seem to be no exception. Most importantly, they register the intensity of Will's visual encounter with Mede: as the repeated references to the richness of her attire (as well as to her sexuality) suggest, the object of Will's gaze is indeed "mede mesurelees," a combination of exorbitant wealth and sexual intemperance. It is not accidental that in this passage Will uses the first-person pronoun "I" only three times, and two of those are coupled with verbs of visual perception ("I loked" and "saugh I nevere"). That is, the poetic subject here emerges nebulously as an answer to the overpowering, almost physically unbearable (he is "ravysshed") scene of erotic and economic excess. Elusive and fragile, threatened to be undone by the very spectacle that generates him (as well as by sovereign violence), the Langlandian subject encapsulates the risks associated with the desire for meed.

Indeed, the word "coveitise" that Holy Church uses to warn Will off Mede also implies inordinate desire to possess what belongs to another (*OED*).¹⁸ Holy Church's words here suggest that Will is part of a male continuum whose members define their identity, both collectively and individually, by competing for Mede. Like every other male character, Will desires Mede, a personification of material gain and promiscuity, a reward at once pecuniary and sexual. (Will's curiosity about her marital status ["I hadde wonder ... whos wif she were"] also injects the anxiety of competition and thus propels his desire.) His primary rival, however, is the King; and this rivalry between Will and his sovereign takes on an additional significance if we recall that Mede is not just a gendered character and a allegory personifying money and riches, but the word "meed" as well. As such, she synecdochically

¹⁸ I am grateful to Heather Dubrow for bringing this point to my attention.

denotes language, adding a further dimension to this traffic in women and economic riches that I have focused upon so far. Words become a contentious site of asserting authority and resistance.

Control over Mede is control over language, for to possess Mede is not only to be married to a woman or to receive payment or gift; it is also to master the extremely elusive signifier “meed.” In Middle English, “meed” is gift, reward, payment, and bribe; in the poem’s diegesis, Mede is a whore and a lady, a commoner and a noble woman, a bastard and a legitimate child. As James Simpson succinctly summarizes it, Mede is “an ambiguity, a word which refuses to be tied down in any fixed way, and which can provoke exclusive and opposed definitions” (*Introduction* 44).¹⁹ Indeed much of the Mede episode takes the shape of a negotiation of the meaning of “meed,” such as Conscience’s attempts to distinguish between the “two manere of Medes” (III. 231). That this negotiation, we shall recall, takes the form of a legal proceeding in a royal court of law draws our attention to the sovereign’s key role in this hermeneutic process: the King becomes the principal interpreter of the word “meed.”²⁰ His concluding remarks at the end of passus IV aim to put an end to this hermeneutic chaos and to arrest the dissemination of Mede’s meanings and roles, by decisively severing her from truth: “Mede overmastreth Lawe and much truth letteth [impedes],” the King says, “Ac Reson shal rekene with you, if I reigne any while, / And deme yow, bi this day, as ye han deserved” (IV.176-78). From a sociological perspective this re-translates the hierarchical structure of social distinction. Just like the King’s power over Mede represents the unequal distribution of wealth in a society, possessing her is a form of linguistic capital, e.g. access to a certain set of meanings or mastery of normative grammar that determines the speakers’ social status (Bourdieu, *Symbolic* 43-65). Considering the structural and imaginative similarities between economic exchange and linguistic signification, between the circulation of coins and that of linguistic signs (see, for example, Shell, *The Economy of Literature*), the

¹⁹ On a philosophical note, Derrida has observed that even in modern European languages the notion of gift (that is, one of the meanings of “meed”) is characterized by the “madness of the dissemination of the meaning ‘gift’” (*Given Time* 55).

²⁰ Considering that Mede is “a signifier unattached to its proper referent ... Truth” (Hala 105, 119), the king’s trial of Mede appears to reflect the anxieties surrounding the detachment in late medieval England of the increasingly textualized, written law from actual intention. See R. F. Green, *Crisis*; Steiner 93-142.

King here at once formulates the economic rules of exchanging Mede and, from a linguistic perspective, authorizes the principles of dominant language usage that sustains linguistic and social hierarchies in his state.

However, royal jurisdiction over language comes under pressure from the character who holds the ultimate verbal mandate over the text of the poem – Will, the key enunciator of *Piers Plowman*. As the King’s primary rival for Mede as object of desire, Will the speaker is the King’s main challenger in matters of authority in language. Intriguingly, elsewhere in the poem Will describes his own writing as “medlyng with makyng” (XII.16), that is, interfering in the verbal practices of the kingdom. Intriguingly, Will chooses the term “medlying” that not only punningly includes “mede,” but in pre-modern English culture increasingly came to refer, as Bradin Cormack has compellingly demonstrated, to “the violation of an interpretive boundary drawn around the king’s business” (90, see 88-92). The speaker thus locates his poetry (“makyng”) explicitly not only in relation to royal court and royal meed but, pointedly, in opposition to sovereign prerogative over desire, money, and language. The competition between Will and the sovereign for possession of Mede – competition in which the stakes already include Mede’s riches and her body – is transferred onto the textual terrain, where Will’s ambivalent position vis-à-vis royal authority determines Langland’s engagement with two types of poetics inextricably linked to royal culture: courtly and proto-laureate.

Although a pointedly non-courtly text, *Piers Plowman* – despite its lack of a coherent love narrative – shows considerable interest in courtly writing, especially romance (Middleton, “Audience” 114-20; Shepherd; Zeeman, “Tales”); and it has been argued that the overarching structure of the poem is similar to sonnet sequences of the Renaissance whereas the opening vision of the Prologue sets up the interpretive frame of a secular courtly love vision such as the *Roman de la Rose* (Weldon 254, 258). Indeed, the Mede episode opens with a blazon, a literary genre that in pre-modern literature was indissolubly associated with visual erotic pleasure on the one hand, and with courtly literature (and latterly Petrarchism) on the other (Vickers, “Diana;” “Members;” and “Blazon”). Structured around a male scopophilic gaze that dismembers and then re-assembles the body of his

female beloved as a collection of fetishistically displaced, isolated elements, blazon focuses on spectacular female corporeality to which it ruthlessly and misogynistically assigns a sexual value. Will's fascinated description of Mede's sumptuously clothed body I quoted above (II. 7-16) mimics the conventions of the genre: under his lingering gaze, Mede is represented as an array of fragments – head, fingers, torso – scattered and re-arranged in the figures of linguistic parallelism, or as Nancy Vickers phrases it, “a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects” (“Diana” 96).

This blazon is not the only example of Langland's amorous poetic vocabulary. Shortly before he concludes the dream of Mede, he deploys another quintessentially courtly strategy. At the opening of passus V the waking dreamer voices his disappointment “that I ne hadde slept sadder and yseighen moore” (V. 4). In so far as Will confesses that he has not seen enough of Mede, the remark places the speaker in a position similar to that of a courtly lover whose beloved is agonizingly distant and unattainable. In this moment of arrested narrative Will's unrequited desire for Mede resurfaces in exacerbated form. The Mede episode, in other words, is bookended by two instances of writing where Langland is at his most courtly: blazon and enunciation of a lover's separation from his lady. This strategic placement of unmistakably courtly conventions at the two ends of the trial of Mede affects the interpretation of the episode and bestows upon Mede the recognizable characteristics of a medieval courtly lady:²¹ she is ravishing and alluring, lordly and dominant, distant and unassailable; she captivates and remains elusive; to love her is to attempt – futilely – to overcome a series of insurmountable obstacles, such as Mede's possession by another man, in this case, the sovereign himself. Aptly, Langland's allegorical language becomes disturbingly transparent here: a courtly lover who serves his lady does so in the hope of receiving reward from her – that is, “mede;” to possess Mede is to obtain the mede desired by courtly paramours. Mede does not simply promise reward for courtly service; she, as her name indicates, is the reward itself (*donna*),²² and read in this light, the trial of Mede be-

²¹ The point that Langland's description of Mede follows courtly conventions was made some fifty years ago (Burrow, “Audience” 381) but to my knowledge has not been taken up since.

²² Interestingly, Langland's characterization of Mede by way of turning a common noun (“meed”) into a proper name (“Mede”) is similar to Dante's representation of Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* as a

comes a literary court of love that seeks to regulate questions of desire, intimacy, and relationships between the sexes.²³

Between these two set expressions of courtly sensibility, however, one finds an entirely different order of discourse. The text of the poem moves away from an exaltation of Mede's courtly body towards discrediting her and the mode of writing she represents. The narrative of Mede's interrupted marriage to False and her subsequent trial at the royal court in the end paints her as sexually promiscuous, lecherous, and villainous. A blazon, as it were, is converted into a counter-blazon celebrating Mede's ugliness, and on a larger scale Langland appears to question and vitiate the courtly poetics he so masterfully applied to describe Mede. How can we read this textual move on the part of Langland? As Nancy Vickers suggests, "blazon and counter-blazon, fascination and revulsion, desire and disgust went hand in hand" ("Members" 5), meaning that Langland's counter-blazon is semiotically already inscribed between the lines of his blazonic portrait of Mede. Historically, Langland's departure from the courtly poetics of blazon and his abhorrence of Mede – despite putting Mede on a pedestal, he abhors her as an emblem of evil (she is sensuous, loquacious, overdressed, and duplicitous) – exemplifies the logic of medieval misogyny (see H. R. Bloch).

As I would like to suggest, this scorning of Mede can be read in poetic terms, against Langland's poetic subjectivity constructed between courtliness and laureateship. Indeed the very scope of Will's first dream, with its graphic descriptions of the origins of a kingdom, the king's coronation (Prologue 146-210), acts of royal justice and sovereign violence (II-IV), suggests the proto-laureate ambition of a writer whose poetic performance aims at honoring, legitimizing, or rectifying the existing political order. Will the laureate – the subject of the poetic utterance that enunciates his dream of

person and a personification: she is a character whose personal name (Beatrice) incorporates her narrative qualities (*beata* ["blessed"]).

²³ On the historical courts of love, see P. Goodrich 29-71. Just like the courts of love Goodrich discusses, the trial of Mede recycles in its imaginary form other areas of historical pre-modern jurisdiction, first of all regal and ecclesiastical. Unlike those courts, however, Langland's amorous legal battle is not represented as a "minor," "marginal" form of legal practice, but rather occupies a place at the centre of the political and the jurisdictional. The trial of Mede, albeit a court of love, concerns the very foundations of the kingdom, and its reverberations extend well beyond the questions of legitimate and illegitimate sexual desire.

Mede and makes the spectacle of sovereignty a public text – authorizes royal power over Mede and is simultaneously authorized by this power. The act of denouncing Mede as a threat to the legal and moral stability of the kingdom, which can be characterized as an inversion of courtly poetics, from this perspective becomes a paradigmatic laureate gesture, the act of a poet whose writing answers the call of political expediency rather than probes the ideological mystique of courtly love.

But this laureate desire seems to be undone by the last paroxysm of erotic longing. Simultaneously a laureate and a courtly lover, the Langlandian subject in the Mede episode in the end subverts both forms of poetic identification. Will's project of laureateship is imperiled because Langland grounds Will's relation with Mede in the discourse of desire. His role as a laureate is at variance with his erotic rivalry with the monarch and his self-presentation as a courtly lover; as a result, courtly poetics is re-written as a political attack on Mede while his laureate ambition is in the end undermined by the perpetuation of desire. As the episode unfolds, Will is revealed as a dissident laureate whose erotic longing disrupts the fabric of political and poetic authority, and as an anti-courtly poet whose utterance simultaneously utilizes and sabotages the discourse of amatory verse for political ends. The instability of Mede, who allegorizes both material riches (the reward of a laureate) and gratification of sexual desire (the reward of a courtly lover), adulterates the linguistic aspect of meed: the Langlandian subject's uncertain position between courtliness and laureateship emerges as pregnant with failure and anxiety, positing vital terms for understanding the poetic subject in Wyatt and Spenser. The poetics of meed becomes a precarious form of writing where one identity undermines the other, yet both remain inextricably coupled by their attachment to the category of reward.

“Deth for to be my mede:” Love, Death, and Reward in Wyatt's Poetry

The word “meed” occurs in Wyatt's canon only once, but the context in which it is deployed deserves close attention. The poem where Wyatt uses it is a Petrarchan complaint on the cruelty of his mistress, which the speaker contrasts with the sympathy that nature grants him:

Resound my voyse, ye wodes that here me plain,
Boeth hilles and vales causing reflexion;
And Ryvers eke record ye of my pain,
Which have ye oft forced by compassion
As Judges to here myn exclamation;
Emong whome pitie I fynde doeth remayn:
Where I it seke, Alas, there is disdain. (XXII.1-7)²⁴

That this poem is a love lyric, however, is not clear until the last of the three stanzas. The first stanza – the one just quoted – rather shows the speaker in search of pity, with one of his addressees willing to offer compassion and the other expressing disdain; and the quasi-legalistic vocabulary of the poem (“plain,” “record,” “pain,” “Judges,” “exclamation,” “pity”) is just as evocative of court proceedings as it is of erotic longing. For all we know, the speaker might well be seeking redress or deploring an unjust court ruling rather than his beloved’s insouciance, especially if we pursue a biographically informed reading of the text, through the poet’s imprisonments in 1534, 1536 and 1541. When the third stanza finally identifies the second addressee of the poem as the lady to whom the speaker directs his suit (“Why then, helas, doeth not she on me rew? / Or is her hert so herd that no pitie / May in it synke my Joye for to renew?” [15-17]), the interpretive relief it offers to the reader is short-lived: the last two lines paint an even more unsettling picture of the poet-mistress relationship: “No grace to me from the[e] there may procede, / But as rewarded deth for to be my mede” (20-21), the poet exclaims. Wyatt’s single use of the word “meed” is tainted with death.

The final word of the poem is noticeably Langlandian, but intersections between the *Mede passūs* and Wyatt’s courtly text run deeper than the one verbal equivalent. In “Resound my voyse” we find ourselves in the imaginary setting of a legal court which, as the poem unfolds, becomes a court of love. The speaker complains – writes – in the hope of receiving reward from his beloved and a le-

²⁴ All parenthetical references to Wyatt’s poems are to the Muir-Thompson edition, with poem and line numbers indicated. Despite massive criticisms mounted against the volume, it remains the only original spelling edition of Wyatt’s poems.

gal authority. The reward, however, comes in the form of violence directed at the subject who seeks meed (“deth for to be my mede”), but simultaneously in the form of sexual favour, “death” being ubiquitous early modern English slang for “orgasm.” Besides, the speaker of the poem is preoccupied with the ability of language to serve its communicative purpose, which makes the impotence of his speech to win pity and compassion one of the focal points of the text. Consequently, like all the other words in the poem failing in their persuasive mission, “meed” is but a hollow sign – an empty sound of the lover’s endlessly proliferating, dilatory discourse caught in the cyclical repetition of linguistic marks. Much like Langland’s Mede, Wyatt’s “mede” is a signifier divorced from its referent.²⁵

Though this poem is the only instance where Wyatt mentions “meed” with its rich Langlandian connotations, the category of reward is crucial to Wyatt’s poetic and social identity. Thomas Wyatt was the son of Sir Henry Wyatt, adept royal administrator and accomplished courtier who had accrued numerous properties, including Allington Castle in Kent, the seat of the Wyatt family, for his service under Henry VII and Henry VIII. Thomas Wyatt himself went on to attain multiple rewards for his service: sewer extraordinary of the Crown, esquire for the King’s body, and clerk of the King’s jewels; Commissioner of the Peace in Essex (1532) and Sheriff of Kent (1536); a successful military officer and Marshal of Calais from 1528 to 1530; a diplomat employed by his king on crucial missions in France, Italy, and Spain and knighted for his service to the king in 1535.²⁶ It is not surprising that Wyatt’s love poetry has been repeatedly read in the context of his service to Henry VIII.²⁷ The Petrarchan rendition of *fin’ amor* clearly reverberated with Wyatt’s role at the king’s court, with the narrative of Wyatt’s career as a royal servant always lurking behind his expressions of passion:

What vailleth trouth? or, by it, to take payn?

To stryve, by stedfastnes, for to attayne,

²⁵ For “semiotic inconsistency” – an erosion of the link between signifiers and signifieds – that characterizes Wyatt’s poetry in general, see T. Greene 242-63 (258). See also Ferry 71-118 for a discussion of Wyatt’s distrust of language, and D. M. Ross 118-68.

²⁶ For an overview of Wyatt’s biography and career, see Foley 4-33; Heale *Wyatt* 11-19; G. Walker 282-86. All three draw on Muir’s *Life and Letters*.

²⁷ See, for example, A. Fox 257-85; Greenblatt 115-56; Heale 7-69; H. Mason 171; J. Robinson 105-40; Southall 39-53; G. Walker 279-376.

To be juste, and true: and fle from dowblenes:

Sythens all alike, where rueleth craftines

Rewarded is boeth fals, and plain.

Sonest he spedeth, that most can fain;

True manyng hert is had in disdayn.

Against deceipte and dowblenes

What vaileth trouth?

Decyved is he by crafty trayn

That meaneth no gile and doeth remayn

Within the trapp, withoute redresse,

But, for to love, lo, suche a maisteres,

Whose crueltie nothing can refrayn,

What vaileth trouth? (II)

“What vaileth trouth” has been described as “a brooding reflection on career, rule, and *reward* until the close jars us into connecting the disillusioned perception of power with the disillusioned perception of love” (Greenblatt 144, emphasis added). The speaker indeed appears to be concerned primarily with “attaining” and “being rewarded” with some kind of economic recompense for his actions. Of course Wyatt’s speaker almost keeps himself out of the circle of reward by avoiding the use of the first-person pronoun. Instead, he addresses an audience and represents the experience as though it referred to anyone but the speaker, and it is only the power of lyric identification that unavoidably draws the speaker’s subjectivity into the orbit of the poem. Like everyone else around him, we can then assume, he desires reward. But what kind of reward? If much of the poem suggests that the reward the speaker expects should take economic form, the last lines shift focus towards sexual gratification. This is where Greenblatt, in contrasting reward with love, misses the crucial point that *fin’amor* is also predicated upon meed – the ultimate gift of sexual grace bestowed upon the lover. Rather, the reward Wyatt’s speaker is after in this poem is at once pecuniary and sexual – that is, a

combination we have already encountered in the allegorical figure of Lady Mede, a personification of material gain and sexual promiscuity.

Fittingly, “What vaileth truth” is written in a language reminiscent of *Piers Plowman*: as we recall, Will encounters Mede when he seeks to know about the truth, but he has to content himself with the knowledge of the false; likewise, Wyatt locates his Petrarchan mistress in opposition to “truth,” an intrinsically English, Germanic concept (Graham 39-40; T. Greene 254-55). The cruel lady endorses “craftines,” “deceipte and dowblenes” while the speaker’s “true meanyng hert is had in disdain.” If to lust after Mede is to veer from the Castle of Truth towards the Dungeon of Falsehood, to desire Wyatt’s cruel “maisteres” is likewise to forswear the “truth” and to receive a reward of insincerity and duplicity. As Wyatt’s speaker exclaims elsewhere, “And for reward of ouer greate desire / Disdaynfull dowblenes have I hier! / O lost seruise! O pain ill rewarded!” (V.5-7).

Other texts, too, confirm the Langlandian genealogy of Wyatt’s mistress. Endowed with a hypertrophied sensuality often regarded as his “special contribution to Petrarchism” (Crewe 33; cf. McCanles 145), the courtly lady of Wyatt’s sonnets frequently resembles Mede:

My hert I gave the not to do it payn,
But to preserue it was to the taken;
I serued thee not to be forsaken,
But that I should be rewarded again.
I was content thy seruant to remain,
But not to be payed vnder this fasshion.
Nowe syns in the is none othre reason,
Displease the not if that I do refrain.
Vnsatiat of my woo and thy desire,
Assured by craft to excuse thy fault. (XIV.1-10)

The lady’s falsity and insatiable desire echo Conscience’s “mede mesurelees;” and that the poem pushes the rhetoric of reward almost to its parodic limit – reward, it must be noted, that again re-

mains ambiguous, for between the “hert” of line 1 and the lady’s desire in line 9 the conversation is carried out in administrative terms (“I serued thee ... / not to be payed vnder this fasshion”) – makes parallels between Langland’s obsession with Mede’s promiscuity and Wyatt’s angst of his sexually empowered beloved even more striking. It is indeed remarkable that in many instances the use of the word “measure” in Wyatt’s poetry is coupled with quasi-Langlandian “measureless” excess: his lady is “spitefull, without cause, or mesure” (I.8) while love, fortune and his mind torment him so that he envies them “beyonde all mesure” (XXXI.4); the pleasure patience takes in the lover’s sufferings is “owte of mesure” (XL.18), and the harm he suffers may be “runne to farre owte of mesure” (LVII.14); love itself, Wyatt admits, is “[a] poure tresoure / Withoute mesure” (LXXXVII.39). Like Will, Wyatt’s subject articulates himself in response to an impact of excessive economic and erotic desire, struggling to grapple with inordinate affect. In contrast to *Piers Plowman*, however, the spectacle of excess is altogether missing from Wyatt’s poems; what remains instead is the introspective agonizing of vulnerable subjectivity. But at the same time, the object of the lover’s reflection, the primary cause of his sufferings and the fulcrum of his selfhood, displays the same qualities as Langland’s Mede: she herself and desire for her are dangerously “beyonde mesure.”

That Wyatt’s beloved bears a stamp of “meed measureless” is only half the case, however. Describing erotic desire, poems like “My hert I gave thee” and “What vaileth trouthe” utilize a political vocabulary of relationships between sovereign and subject so that it is “notoriously difficult,” Alastair Fox writes, “to discern whether a Wyatt poem has an erotic or a political signification” (265; cf. Greenblatt 144; McCanles; Kamholtz; J. Robinson 106-07). Expanding on these critical observations, and following Peter Goodrich in his claim that “[t]he jurisdiction of love traditionally concerned the hierarchical relationship between sovereign and subject” (48), I would like to suggest that these texts, as it were, present a double address: non-gender specific “thou” can stand for both the poet’s beloved and his master; moreover, the language of these texts has as much to do with economic recompense as it has with sexual gifts. In other words, the poems construct a triangle of relationship between the speaker, his mistress, and his master. As in *Piers Plowman* where Mede simultaneously represents the

gifts of love and of money, both controlled by the monarch in charge of granting and withholding reward who produces his subjects betwixt desire and the impossibility of its gratification, Wyatt's self in these poems emerges out of a distinctly Langlandian economy of exchange between the speaker and his lord, where circulation of reward (lady as meed) takes the shape, intermittently, of pecuniary payments for political service and of erotic favours given to the lover by the lady controlled by his sovereign.

In the poems that feature the lover's lord as a distinct figure (instead of his lurking behind the rhetoric of power), the intersubjective relationship tends to replicate the rivalrous Langlandian triangle of a lover, his sovereign, and their contentiously shared object of desire:

Desire, alas, my master and my foo,
So sore alterd thi sellff how mayst thou se?
Some tyme I sowght that dryvyes me to and fro;
Some tyme thow ledst that ledyth the and me.
What reson is to rewle thy subiectes so
By forcyd law and mutabilite?
For where by the I dowtyd to have blame,
Evyn now by hate agayne I dowl the same. (LXXV)

What emerges out of the tortuous syntax and vocabulary of this poem is the presence of a third party in the relationship between the lover and his master (a relationship, it must be noted, which is again predicated on legal discourse). Though never explicitly named, there is something – or someone – that “dryvyes” the speaker “to and fro” even as this object or person “ledyth” the master and his subject. If we concede that Wyatt's twisted lines suggest the existence of a lady (a reading supported by the courtly ethos of the poem), it follows that both the speaker and his master desire this lady. The lord is “alterd” – moved, or enamoured – by the lady as much as the speaker is, which makes the two men rivals in this pursuit. She exercises control over both lover and sovereign, but at the same time

the lady, like Mede, is also as subject to the law of the master as the speaker is: “Some tyme thow ledst that ledyth the and me.”

Similarly, the opening lines of “The longe love” erode the distinction between the lover and his lord:

The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar
And in myn hert doeth kepe his residence
Into my face preseth with bold pretence,
And therein campeth, spreding his baner. (IV.1-4)

This blurred boundary not only marks the speaker’s inclusion in the body politic of his feudal lord (“What may I do, when my maister fereth, / But, in the felde, with him to lyve and dye?” [12-13]) but, conversely, extends to his master the attributes of the speaker, such as erotic longing. As a result of this confusion of roles (cf. Ferry 115; Heale, *Wyatt* 95), both the ruler and the subject fall pray to the lady’s beauty: she wills that the speaker’s “trust, and lustes negligence / Be rayned by reason, shame, and reverence” (6-7), while at the same time she “[w]ith *his* hardines taketh displeasure” (8, emphasis added). In this line penile tumescence is an attribute of the master, not the speaker. Both subject and sovereign are thus implicated in the discourse of desire and revealed as subjects to love, indicating that the poet seeks not only to trace the lover’s changeable fortunes but to investigate the vicissitudes of monarchical infatuation. Consequently, it places the speaker in a twofold relationship to the monarch: as lover, insofar as he never fully rejects his own erotic longing, he bows allegiance to his lord as a loyal subject, but in light of the sovereign’s own desire for the same lady, the lover is his rival. It is also significant that parallels between the dream of Mede and Wyatt’s sonnet are not only structural (i.e. triangular relationship between lover, sovereign, and lady), but formal (or generic) as well. Both texts enact a kind of psychomachia: Wyatt’s lord and his lady are facets of the lover’s mind and body (“The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar / And in myn hert doeth kepe his residence”), but the spectacle of Mede in *Piers Plowman*, it is useful to remember, is Will’s dream, which likewise makes it a projection of the subject’s interiority (i.e. the trial of Mede is a representation of Will’s

“coveitise” and his attempts to regulate various kinds of affect). Wyatt’s Petrarchan poem (a translation of “*Amor, che nel penser*”), in other words, turns out to be a quasi-medieval English dream vision in which the subject’s inward struggle with desire is figured in palpable form as a clash between allegorical personifications.

But perhaps no other poem exemplifies the Langlandian logic of meed more eloquently than Wyatt’s most famous Petrarchan sonnet, “Whoso list to hounte” (a rendition of Petrarch’s “*Una candida serva*”):

Who so list to hounte I know where is an hynde;
But as for me, helas, I may no more:
The vayne travaill hath weried me so sore,
I ame of them that farthest cometh behinde;
Yet may I by no meanes my weried mynde
Drawe from the Dier: but as she fleeth afore
Faynting I folowe; I leve of therefore,
Sithens in a nett I seke to hold the wynde.
Who list her hount, I put him owte of dowbte,
As well as I, may spend his tyme in vain:
And graven with Diamondes in letters plain
There is written her faier neck rounde abowte:
'Noli me tangere for Cesars I ame,
And wylde for to hold, though I seme tame.' (VII)

The poem voices the frustration of a hunter/lover who, speaking from the margins of a company of hunters (“I ame of them that farthest cometh behinde”), is involved in futile pursuit of an elusive wild hind/beloved. The deer and the process of pursuit serve as the foundation to the speaker’s identity: “Yet may I by no meanes my weried mynde / Draw from the Diere.” As the poem unfolds, it becomes evident that the hunt is scripted by royal power. When the hind finally appears, Caesar stays

the hunter's hand and contains the speaker's desire for the beloved by inscribing his prohibitive edict, in the imperious Latin, on her collar: "Noli me tangere for Cesars I ame / And wylde for to hold, though I seme tame."

Obviously, it is tempting to read the sonnet in the context of Wyatt's conjectural loss of Anne Boleyn to Henry VIII, as has been successfully done multiple times.²⁸ It is also safe to argue, with Greenblatt, that the speaker's subjectivity in this poem is "shaped by the relation to the Caesar and the object of desire" (146-50; also see M. Waller, "Empire's New Clothes" 178). What interests me, however, is teasing out the Langlandian connotations of such configuration of roles in this poem, even though Wyatt's sonnet again abandons much of the spectacle of Mede that fascinated Will, focusing instead on the lyric subject's explorations of his desires and fears.²⁹ What I have earlier referred to as a triangular economy of desire – lover, lady, and sovereign – appears as such only if we exclude all the other players. Meanwhile, the hunt described by Wyatt includes several male hunters pursuing one female hind, where one of the hunters, or at least one of the men who desires to control the hind, is Caesar. This social disposition replicates the world of passūs II-IV of *Piers Plowman*, where men vie with one another for the right to possess Mede, with one of them – the King – claiming the royal prerogative over the process. As in Langland's text, however, the meed placed in front of the hunters is both erotic and economic. The courtly context of the poem implies sexual gratification as the ultimate prize to the lover, though the association of the hind with desirability also arises out of her characterization as "wild," that is, sexually incontinent.³⁰ In the context of the instability of early modern English orthography, at the same time, the "dier" they all seek is not just a deer but a

²⁸ Most recently by G. Walker, who reads it as "an openly biographical reminiscence of his complex feelings for a living woman, Anne [Boleyn]" (287). See also A. Fox 258-64. For instances of more balanced readings that avoid oversimplification of biographical identifications, see Greenblatt 146; Foley 99-100; Heale 56; J. Robinson 135.

²⁹ It is a stock argument among the critics that Wyatt's translation discards much of the visual dimension of Petrarch's sonnet. See Braden, "Wyatt" 240; Crewe 38; Glaser 215; Greenblatt 146; T. Greene 261; Lever 26; J. Robinson 135. What is also absent from the poem, however, is the Langlandian spectacle of excess, replaced with interior monologue.

³⁰ Although in early modern English "wild" was connoted as both "unrestrained" (i.e. promiscuous) and "shy" (i.e. chaste), its opposition to "tame" tips the semantic balance towards the former. See Dubrow 97; Estrin 142; Foley 99; Greenblatt 147-48;

“costly” and “expensive” object (Ferry 112). Even leaving the pun aside, her collar is “graven with Diamondes” (which, we know from Langland, are stones “of derrest pris”), and the cost of venison alone was sufficient to suggest that catching the hind represented more than emotional gain.³¹ The underlying principle of this community of hunters, therefore, is the operation of meed, of sexual and material reward, that ties masculine subjects to one another and to their sovereign.

From this angle the Caesar, in addition to claiming the courtly lady’s erotic body, asserts control over the wealth she symbolizes, making Wyatt’s deer/dear much closer to Mede than the Petrarchan genealogy of the sonnet at first allows. The hind’s words (“Noli me tangere for Cesars I ame”), acknowledging that she is the property of the king, simultaneously allude to the legendary Roman practice of inscribing the motto over the collars of Caesar’s hinds, and to the Bible (John 20:17 and Matthew 22:21). The last reference is particularly revealing: as Marguerite Waller has suggested (“Empire’s New Clothes” 171-72), the biblical phrase “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” part of which is inscribed over the collar on Wyatt’s hind’s neck, associates the beloved with coins bearing the royal image. In addition to allegorizing worldly riches, the hind also represents coins that can be exchanged by everyone but ultimately are the property of the monarch, a sign of his wealth and power. As Stephen Deng has recently shown, in early modern England the circulation of royal coins was one of the key mechanisms of state formation: exchanging money signified the subjects’ willingness to recognize the power of the sovereign, although such practices as coin clipping and counterfeiting could undermine state authority.³²

³¹ Retha Warnicke relates an anecdote told by Wyatt’s grandson, that the Tudor poet possessed an expensive jewel he had stolen from Anne Boleyn (“Conventions” 113). The story of course cannot be corroborated, but it goes to show that in the early modern imagination possessing Anne Boleyn was associated with material riches.

³² Additionally, it is instructive to consider this motif in light of the Great Debasement of money undertaken by Henry VIII in 1542-1549, when in order to deal with his excessive expenses the king decided to replace a significant amount of gold and silver in the coinage with copper. The result was a dramatic drop in the purity and thus value of English money and their perception as faux objects, coupled with the Crown’s exorbitant profits (see Chown 41-59; Deng 87-102; Gould). Such combination of eroticism with falseness and “mede mesureles” brings the lady of Wyatt’s sonnet even closer to Mede.

At the same time, the language of the claim which seeks to differentiate between what is God's and what is Caesar's – that is, between temporal and spiritual authority – records the jurisdictional battles of Henry's reign which were “effected by the consolidation of royal power at the expense of ecclesiastical jurisdiction,” as well as by the Crown's centralization of jurisdictional authority in order to increase revenues (Cormack 91, also 47-129). If then, to continue with our Langlandian reading of the sonnet, we construe the poem allegorically, a move also warranted by the biblical undercurrent of Wyatt's sonnet, the hind becomes *Anglicana Ecclesia* whose “only supreme head on earth,” according to Henry VIII's 1534 Act of Supremacy, is “the King our sovereign lord,” the title which allows him to claim not only the Church's “honours, dignities, [and] preeminences” but her “profits and commodities” as well (*Tudor Constitution* 364). It is also useful to recall that the sonnet – just like “The longe love” (cf. Holahan) – is set in the symbolic order of a royal forest, that is, in an area of space where, according to early modern jurisprudence, a set of very specific laws operates. “A Forest is a certen Territorie of woody grounds and fruitfull pastres,” John Manwood writes in *A Treatise and Discourse of the Lawes of the Forest* (1598), “priuiledged for wild beasts and foules of, Forest, Chase, and Warren, to rest and abide in, in the safe protection of the King, for his princely delight and pleasure ... For the preseruacion and continuance of which said place, together with the vert and Unison, there are certen partculer Lawes, Priuiledges, and Officers” (A1^{r-v}). Under English law, venison in the royal forests was the exclusive property of the Crown, prohibited from use by private subjects (Baker 317).

Consequently, embedded in this hunt for the hind, both literal and allegorical, is economic, erotic, but also legal competition with the king, because “desire for her becomes a way of exploring the desire to displace the king himself” (Gil 17). While the sovereign seemingly places an object of erotic and economic desire in front of the hunters, he simultaneously prohibits possession of the hind by anyone but himself. Rivalry with the sovereign that was implied in other texts comes to the fore in “Who so list to hounte.” This is perhaps where Wyatt's sonnet departs from the Langlandian scenario the most. If in *Piers Plowman* we observed actual exchange, with Mede being shifted between several

characters, “Who so list to hounte” all but forecloses this opportunity for its male personages. In contrast to the public forum of Langland’s dream vision, where the fate of Mede is discussed if not decided collectively, Wyatt’s poem is from the start reconciled to the idea of yielding its meed to the king. This is hardly surprising, for the last lines of the sonnet contain a veiled threat to the speaker derived from the edictal nature of the inscription “Noli me tangere.” Looming large behind these words is the figure of the king vested with sovereign violence and threatening the subject with death. Although spoken by the hind, they not only assert her subjectivity, as some critics have argued (M. Waller, “Empire’s New Clothes” 169; Estrin 136-44), but they “betray [her] language as that of another, written by or on behalf of ‘Caesar’” (Powell 429). The words engraved on the hind’s collar, albeit spoken in the first person, transmit the will of the sovereign.

At the same time, Wyatt’s speaker retains his privileged position vis-à-vis the other hunters: not only is he the only one to whom the ownership of the hind is revealed (“Who list her hount, I put him owte of dowbte, / As well as I, may spend his tyme in vain”), but as the primary enunciating “I” of the sonnet, he – like Will – exercises a certain degree of textual authority over the hunt and even over his lord because, after all, we only know about the lady and the monarch from what the speaker is willing to disclose. Writing in this sonnet, as in *Piers Plowman*, is the crucial site where the subject can enact his agency, asserting his will against that of his sovereign. In fact, the only object the speaker can hold in his hands – the only meed he ever gets – is the wind (“Sithens in a nett I seke to hold the wynde”), but rather than signifying emptiness or nothingness (or debased or counterfeit coins), “wind” in pre-modern English culture functions as a synecdoche for speech. Chaucer deploys the trope in *The House of Fame* (765-68), and Wyatt himself equates the two in the line “What nedeth these thretning wordes and wasted wynde” (XLVIII.1). The speaker’s only meed, what the lover is left with, is then words – or rather, *the* words, his text created out of the Langlandian economy of erotic and economic desire for the meed. As Derrida remarks, “the definition of language ... as well as of the text in general, cannot be formed without a certain relation to gift, to giving-taking and so forth;” and consequently “[a] discourse on the gift ... must and can only be part or party in the field it

describes, analyzes, defines” (*Given Time* 79-80, 62). Language is not only something already given, but it engages its subjects in exchange, or giving and receiving; and a text about meed will yield some kind of reward, if only textual. Indeed, just like the final product of Will’s unrequited desire for Mede is the ever-expanding text of *Piers Plowman*, Wyatt’s poem becomes its own meed.

The enterprise of challenging your sovereign, however, is a precarious one, regardless of whether it takes place in erotic pursuit or in the text. To use a remarkably Langlandian phrase from *A Discourse of the Common Weal of This Realm of England* (1549, published in 1581), a treatise that discusses the policies of Henry VIII and his son Edward VI, “It is dangerous to meddle in the King’s matters and specially if it may have any likelihood to diminish his profit” (108). “Meddling,” however, as Langland’s poem reminds us, is a term whose connotations stretch from economic to political to linguistic. Indeed, as the king’s threatening words in “Who so list to hounte” indicate, encroaching upon his prerogative bodes ill to the trespasser. What is the significance of this sovereign claim to property and sexual enjoyment and of the implied danger of “Noli me tangere for Cesars I ame”? As I already noted, these well may be echoes of Wyatt’s horrifying personal experience in the wake of Anne Boleyn’s fall. The second queen of Henry VIII was accused of adultery on several counts and confined to the Tower, which was followed by an arrest of a group of courtiers all suspected of having been sexually involved with the queen. Wyatt appears to have been among them, though the heavily mythologized history of his relationship with Boleyn makes it impossible to determine whether he was seriously considered guilty at the time, or whether his incarceration was related to the Boleyn trial at all (Muir, *Life* 29). Likewise, the degree of peril that Wyatt was in is hard to determine today on the basis of scanty and conflicting evidence; the same witness (John Hussee) reported that Wyatt was imprisoned, though in no danger of life, but later he recanted and claimed that Wyatt was to suffer with the rest (Muir, *Life* 31-32; G. Walker 289). Unlike the others, however, Wyatt was released, probably due to a lack of evidence (Muir, *Life* 30-31), but not before he saw the execution of Anne Boleyn and her alleged lovers, which suggested that the king’s subject’s desire for a woman that belongs to the king spelled death to the subject in Tudor England.

Even without linking the poem to a specific event, “writing under tyranny,” as Greg Walker has shown, is always vulnerable to an intrusion of political violence (279-376). Recalling the sylvan setting of the poem, it is worth noting that the threat of the king’s words is exacerbated by the revival of the severest forestry regime in England under the Tudors (Marvin 53). Further, even if we concede that the speaker’s challenge to the sovereign is limited to verbal rivalry (*both* subject and sovereign speak in the sonnet, one directly, the other vicariously), words in Henrician England carried with them a possibility of death: under the Treason Act of 1534, those who

do maliciously *wish, will or desire by words or writing*, or by craft imagine, invent, practise, or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the King’s most royal person, the Queen’s or heirs apparent, or to deprive them of any of their dignity, title or name of their royal estates, or slanderously and maliciously publish and pronounce, *by express writing or words*, that the king should be heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the crown . . . shall have and suffer such pains of death and other penalties as is limited and accustomed in cases of high treason. (*Tudor Constitution* 63, emphasis added)

Henry’s treason law replaced the 1352 statute passed under Edward III and differed from the earlier act precisely in extending the definition of treason from action to words, effectively making treason a verbal act. While treason by words had precedents in fifteenth century common law, Henry’s 1534 statute enacted a revolution in the English law, for the first time turning speaking and writing into capital offences, that is, high treason (Bellamy 14; Lemon 5-8). As historians calculate, the number of those executed for allegedly speaking treason in Henry’s VIII was the highest in all English history (Cressy 48-54). In addition, Henry VIII by 1530s had claimed to himself the prerogative over pardoning in England and Wales, especially in individual cases (Kesselring 56-90), thus legally investing his royal person with the power of life and death over the subject. This does not mean that Henry VIII’s power was absolute or extended above the law; rather, the accumulation of legal and political capital

in the Crown placed the subjects of giving, taking, desiring, and speaking – such as the lover of “Who so list to hounte” – in grave danger.

In other words, the circulation of erotic and pecuniary reward in Wyatt’s universe is predicated on the gift of death from the sovereign. I have already noted that in the one poem where Wyatt uses the word “meed” it is equated with annihilation. We can now revisit the symbolism of Wyatt’s phrase. In the shadow of Henry VIII’s reign, the traffic in meed regulated by the sovereign – be it money, women, or words that are at stake – bore a mark of death. As specimens of the Henrician regime, Wyatt’s poems register the culture of violence that saturated the political sphere of Tudor England. But behind the historical reality of Tudor political violence, it is easy to lose sight of the symbolic violence that Langland’s poem inscribes in the category of meed. As markedly vernacular poems that recast Petrarchan images into the language of Langland’s poem, Wyatt’s “Who so list to hounte” and the other texts I have considered absorb and redeploy the poetic connotations of “meed” – including sovereign violence – which emerge out of the medieval text.

Remembering, however, that for Wyatt “meed” is also markedly a word and a synecdoche of language and poetic practice (“meddlying”), an association of meed with death exposes the perils surrounding Wyatt’s self-identification as a vernacular Petrarchan poet of meed. Erotic rivalry with the sovereign – one of the key elements of the poetics of meed – places the project of courtly desire and courtly writing in grave danger. As in the Mede episode of *Piers Plowman*, however, in Wyatt the performance of courtliness is tightly interlaced with a laureate ambition, although those who look for its signs in Wyatt’s verse find his poems bereft of genuine poetic fervour (Braden, “Wyatt” 242, 244; Ferry 92-93; Sessions, “Surrey’s Wyatt” 188-89). Meanwhile, Wyatt’s imbrication in the economy of royal meed, as well as cross-pollination between the rhetoric of courtly service and the rhetoric of civil service to the king, invest his speaker with near-laureate duties. When Meyer-Lee characterizes Wyatt as an anti-laureate (224-30), he acknowledges that Wyatt is aware of the fact that he owes much of his poetic identity to the Henrician court; and although the Tudor poet rejects the models of relationship with the sovereign that fifteenth-century Lydgatean laureateship offers, substituting for

them the erotic desire of *fin' amor*, the structure of interpersonal relations with the ruler in his poems often remains essentially laureate. After all, laureateship lies at the heart of Petrarchism (Braden, “Frustration”), and Wyatt’s Petrarchan love poems – such as “Who so list to hounte” – obliquely contribute to the project of writing the emerging English empire.³³

Yet in Langland, we recall, the merging of poetic and political authority in a laureate identity is fraught with failure because of the courtly rivalry between subject and sovereign, and Wyatt is faced with a similar predicament that accompanies his own “medlyng with makyng.” The text that best exemplifies this conflicting nature of the poetics of meed is the introductory section of Wyatt’s paraphrase of the *Penitential Psalms*. Described as “rumination on the nature of princely power and the responsibility of the virtuous subject under tyranny” (G. Walker 350), the psalms are Wyatt’s most laureate-minded text in that they seek to represent a ruler (King David) as performing penance, thus restoring the realm and its king to virtue. The introductory narrative that sets the stage for David’s psalmic utterances, however, demonstrates that for Wyatt the languages of laureateship and of courtliness are precariously intertwined. King David, the narrator of the opening section tells us, submitting to the god of Love, desires Bathsheba, the wife of his subject Uriah, and wishing to possess her, sends Uriah to death in battle. The prophet Nathan soon detects the king’s crime and drives him to repentance, of which the psalms themselves are the product. Wyatt’s focus seems to be on monarchical desire and its detrimental effect on the kingdom: echoing Langland, who chastises those rulers who associate too intimately with Mede (“Ther she [Mede] is wel with the kyng wo is the reaume” [III.153]), the speaker of Wyatt’s *Psalms* prophesizes woe to the realms where kings forget wisdom and succumb to desire, “So that [he] forgott the wisdom and fore-cast / (Which wo to Remes when that thes kynges doth lakk),” for monarchical lust “Kynges from kyngdomes and cytes

³³ In his famous epitaph on Wyatt, Surrey links the dead poet’s tongue with his service to the king: “A tounge, that served in forein realmes his king: / Whose courteous talke to vertue did enflame. / Eche noble hart: a worthy guide to bring / Our English youth, by travail, into fame” (*Richard Tottel’s Songes and sonettes* 35.17-20). The original reference seems to be to Wyatt’s diplomatic service, but the following lines shift emphasis from negotiating international treaties to instructing the audience in virtue, one of the functions of a poet laureate. On Wyatt and Empire, also see R. Greene, *Unrequited* 135-70.

vndermyndyth” (CVIII.17-18, 30). Crucially, however, the circumstances of the *Psalms* arise out of David’s rivalry with Uriah. Both desire the same woman, Bathsheba, which transforms the Biblical narrative into a triangle – a triangle at once Petrarchan and Langlandian – in which a royal subject receives the gift of death from his sovereign for attempts to rival the latter’s desire.

Consequently, the introductory section undertakes a transition from what several critics (Foley 91; Halasz 199) have called Petrarchan poetics in the description of David falling in love with Bathsheba by way of erotic gazing (CVIII.1-16), towards the laureate stance of the second part of the introduction, where the poetic voice changes from amorous to admonishing. In other words, Uriah and Nathan, the two most plausible masks for Wyatt in the *Psalms*,³⁴ cannot co-exist in the text: Uriah has to give way to Nathan, but the latter cannot appear until Uriah is annihilated. This configuration of roles and poetic modes captures Wyatt’s Langlandian dilemma: it is extremely difficult to balance laureateship and courtliness – in other words, to deploy the poetics of meed – without recourse to violence. In order for a laureate poet to emerge the courtly identity must be erased, whereas Wyatt’s primary vehicle of poetic expression, Petrarchism, places the subject in a rival position vis-à-vis his sovereign, undermining his laureate stance. The project of laureateship fails because the courtly poetics of desire interferes in the subject’s relationship with the sovereign, but the role of courtliness proves unsustainable due to the laureate insistence upon the presence of the ruler in the text. The same anxiety that underwrites poetic subjectivity in the Mede episode of *Piers Plowman* operates in Wyatt’s Petrarchan poems – poems that in their Englished Petrarchism rely on the vernacular vocabulary of meed.

“Ravisht with your lovely sight:” The Poetics of Meed in Spenser’s *Amoretti*

Symptomatically, the category of “meed” makes its first appearance in Spenser’s *Amoretti* as early as the second commendatory sonnet. The author of the poem (a “G.W.J”) directs his energy at

³⁴ On the question of behind whose identity Wyatt’s voice is to be found in the *Psalms*, see Estrin 110-12; Foley 90; Greenblatt 121-22; G. Walker 356. None of the critics, however, suggests Uriah.

extolling Colin's muse for her equal excellence at pastoral, epic, and love poetry and predicts that the *Amoretti* will reward Spenser with everlasting fame:

*Ah Colin, whether on the lowly plaine
pyping to shepherds thy sweete roundelaies:
or whether singing in some lofty vaine
heroick deedes of past and present daies:
Or whether in thy lovely mistris praise
thou list to exercise thy learned quill:
thy muse hath got such grace, and power to please,
with rare invention bewtified by skill,
As who therein can ever joy their fill.
O therefore let that happy muse proceede
to climb the height of vertues sacred hill,
where endles honor shall be made thy meede,
Because no malice of succeeding daies
can rase those records of thy lasting praise.³⁵*

Nothing would seem more remote from the Langlandian meed filled with poetic anxiety than this immutable "endles honor" of poetic glory; and yet, considering Spenser's self-fashioning as a radically vernacular poet, linguistic continuity with the medieval poem cannot be ignored. While lauding Spenser for his mastery of the three kinds of poetry, this sonnet prefaces, indeed anticipates, a collection of amorous verse, and as such it inevitably attempts to predict the status of courtly writing (Petrarchism) against the other forms of discourse practiced by Spenser. Among those, epic poetry tightly linked to a laureate performance inevitably takes center stage. The courtly text, however, is yet to follow while the laureate poem already exists as sufficient proof of Spenser's genius. The reward of po-

³⁵ All references to Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* are to *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems*, ed. Oram (598-679), with poem and line numbers given parenthetically.

etic fame shall ensue to the poet, the sonnet thus appears to suggest, provided Spenser can take the next step (“*O therefore let that happy muse proceede / to climb the height of vertues sacred hill*”) and emulate his previous achievement as a laureate (“*heroick deedes of past and present daies*” of *The Faerie Queene*) in the form of a courtly ambition (the soon-to-come *Amoretti*). In other words, Spenser’s meed – like Will’s – lies between the poetry of erotic desire and the poetry of political praise, but with one important difference: whereas Langland’s meed proves unattainable because his laureate and courtly selves remain fundamentally at odds, Spenser’s text promises to negotiate a settlement of this conflict, resulting in “lasting praise.” In other words, what the enigmatic “*G.W.J.*” implies is that the *Amoretti* are a text capable of undoing the Langlandian legacy of meed and successfully integrating courtliness and laureateship within the same poetic text.

This reference to meed is also not surprising because the *Amoretti* are the product of a distinctly Langlandian scenario of social, erotic, and poetic relationships. Like the Medea episode, Spenser’s sequence thrusts its speaker between the courtly lady on the one side, and his sovereign who seeks to intervene in the subject’s private affairs and prescribe the course of his love on the other. As is widely recognized, Spenser writes the *Amoretti* between his monarch Elizabeth Tudor and his beloved and soon-to-be second wife Elizabeth Boyle, locating his poetic subject in a familiar Langlandian script. Of course where in Langland the roles of the sovereign and the lady were clearly demarcated, in the *Amoretti*, with the cycle’s gender configuration significantly altered by the presence of a female monarch, they are not so easy to tell apart. Petrarchan love provided the Elizabethan regime with an ideologically acceptable form of submission on the part of the queen’s (male) subjects, partly alleviating the trauma of female power in patriarchal society.³⁶ Sensitive to the nuances of this rhetorical culture, in a situation when he is writing between, for, and about the two Elizabeths, Spenser fully exploits the ubiquitous rhetoric of political Petrarchism in the *Amoretti*, where he repeatedly merges the private vocabulary of Petrarchan desire with the public rhetoric of submission to

³⁶ See P. Berry; Forster 122-47; Greenblatt 166-69; Marotti, “Love Is Not Love;” Montrose, *Subject* 145-48; Yates. For illicit forms of eroticization of the royal image, see Betts; Montrose, “Shaping.”

sovereignty, making his beloved and queen indistinguishable at times and enacting the homology of courtship and courtiership.

The opening lines of the cycle exploit this ambiguity of Spenser's project. Presumably describing his unreachable beloved, the poet effortlessly slips into a lexicon of royal power:

Happy ye leaves when as those lilly hands,
which hold my life in their dead doing might
shall handle you and hold in loves soft bands,
lyke captives trembling at the victors sight.
And happy lines, on which with starry light,
those lamping eyes will deigne sometimes to look
and reade the sorrowes of my dying spright,
written with teares in harts close bleeding book. (I.1-8)

While the addressee of the sonnet is Elizabeth Boyle, for a poet so sensitive to the vicissitudes of public expression as Spenser the choice of vocabulary is telling, especially in the first quatrain. The beloved's "dead doing might" can be interpreted as an attribute of the poet's sovereign, and indeed it is but the first in a long list of rhetorical figures that associate the lady with monarchical power: elsewhere in the sequence the beloved is described as "soverayne beauty" (III.1 and LXXII.5) and "soverayne saynt" (LXI.2); a "Tyranesse" whose "hart-thrilling eies" "huge massacres ... do make" (X.5-6, XII.1); a "cruell warriour" (XI.3) and an "awfull majesty" (XIII.5); a possessor of "imperious eyes" that "have power to kille" (XLIX.5,2) and the "Lord of power ... / more cruell and more saluage wylde, / then either Lyon or the Lyonesse" (XX.5, 9-10).³⁷ To ignore traces of royal imagery in these figures, or to dismiss them as Petrarchan hyperboles is to misunderstand Spenser's

³⁷ On the presence of Elizabeth Tudor in the *Amoretti*, see Bates, *Rhetoric* 138-40; Fleming 159-61; Kennedy, *Authorizing* 201-35. Juan D. Gil makes an interesting argument for Spenser's treatment of his beloved "as a version of the queen" based on a "massive class disparity" between speaker and lady that some of the sonnets (III, V, IX, XIII, LXI, LXXV, LXXX, and LXXXXII) display (46). In this, however, Spenser is also Langlandian: we can recall that class difference is one of the triggers of Will's desire for Mede.

Langlandian project, one in which both the sovereign and the beloved are equally indispensable to the construction of the poet's subjectivity. As in Langland and Wyatt, however, Spenserian subjectivity is characterized by vulnerability: in the first two lines of the sequence it is threatened (the lady's hands "hold [his] life in their dead doing might") by the intensity of attachment to both royal power and sexual affect.

Similar to *Piers Plowman*, moreover, in sonnet LXXIV this triangular intersubjective arrangement is tied to the circulation of meed:

Most happy letters fram'd by skilfull trade,
with which that happy name was first desynd:
the which three times thrise happy hath me made,
with guifts of body, fortune and of mind.
The first my being to me gave by kind,
from mothers womb deriv'd by dew descent,
the second is my sovereigne Queene most kind,
that honour and large richesse to me lent.
The third my love, my lives last ornament,
by whom my spirit out of dust was rayسد:
to speake her prayse and glory excellent,
of all alive most worthy to be prayسد.
Ye three Elizabeths for ever live,
that three such graces did unto me give.

Spenser thanks his mother, his queen, and his beloved for the "guifts of body, fortune and of mind" (emphasis mine), linking all three women with meed. Adopting Montrose's phrase, we might argue that Spenser here inserts the *Amoretti* "into the economy of courtly service and reward" ("Elizabethan Subject" 319), yet as we have seen, in both Langland and Wyatt "meed" signifies two related kinds of reward the subject can receive, erotic and pecuniary. The same is true for Spenser. Though the queen

is primarily associated with economic recompense and literary fame, the domain of laureateship (“honour and large riches” [8]), in contrast to the beloved, “by whom [his] spirit out of dust was rayzed” (10), which suggests emotional as well as physical elevation (i.e. penile tumescence) of the courtly speaker (erotic reward), the interchangeability of the women’s names somewhat undermines a rigid differentiation of the two types of meed. It seems appropriate to recall in this connection the politics of gift-giving at the Elizabethan court, where the Petrarchan virgin queen was prone to promising and yet withholding gifts as a means to control her male courtiers, transforming material possessions into signs of erotic grace (A. Scott 47-82); and Spenser’s rather futile attempts to receive adequate reward for his poetic service from her (the line “that honour and large riches to me lent” suggests that this royal meed can be easily withdrawn). Both situations imitated courtly unattainability and bespoke economic expediency. In other words, as in *Piers Plowman*, in the world of the *Amoretti* the distribution of meed is closely associated with the ruler’s prerogative.

Rhetorical parallels between lady and sovereign notwithstanding, however, the *Amoretti* are more preoccupied with the Langlandian conflict between the two poles of emotional attachment, specially considering that the queen is one of the characters of the sequence rather than merely a rhetorical echo. Much as Spenser may conflate the images of Elizabeth Boyle and Elizabeth Tudor, the overlap is never complete. In Spenser’s sequence the sovereign is not the speaker’s rival, but that does not mean that Elizabeth Tudor does not seek to exercise control over the speaker’s object of desire. Spenser simultaneously wants to serve – and obtain reward from – his beloved, as an amorous suitor, and his queen, as a loyal subject, but the two kinds of service appear irreconcilable, because “as the speaker’s fall from favor with the one [i.e. Elizabeth Boyle] may constitute a sign of success with the other [i.e. Elizabeth Tudor], ... his acceptance of favor from his beloved may require him to compromise, or even terminate, his service to the monarch” (Kennedy, *Authorizing* 253). It is therefore not surprising that the opening sonnet, putting the act of writing at the heart of a triangle of lover, mistress, and sovereign, represents the product of the lover’s Petrarchan suffering as a “harts close bleeding book” (I.8), a wounded text composed in a dangerous space between the lady and the sovereign.

That Spenser chooses to represent the two Elizabeths as two written texts and thus two kinds of poetics, courtly and laureate, cannot mask the grave stakes involved in the conflict between the speaker's longing for his mistress and his impulse to serve his monarch:

Great wrong I doe, I can it not deny,
to that most sacred Empresse my dear dred,
not finishing her Queene of faëry,
that mote enlarge her living prayses dead:
But lodwick, this of grace to me aread:
doe ye not thinck th'accomplishment of it,
sufficient worke for one mans simple head,
all were it as the rest, but rudely writ.
How then should I without another wit:
thinck ever to endure so tædious toyle,
sins that this one is tost with troublous fit,
of a proud love, that doth my spirite spoyle.
Ceasse then, till she vouchsafe to grawnt me rest,
or lend you me another living brest. (XXXIII)

Addressing his friend Lodwick (Bryskett?), Spenser juxtaposes his public task of completing *The Faerie Queene*, which celebrates Elizabeth Tudor ("her Queene of faëry, / that mote enlarge her living prayses dead"), with the private pleasure of courting Elizabeth Boyle and writing the *Amoretti*, a Petrarchan eulogy of her ("this one is tost with troublous fit, / of a proud love, that doth my spirite spoyle"). His dilemma is that the linearity of language makes it impossible for him to write both texts at the same time, but introducing a hierarchy of writerly projects may result in dire consequences. Though Spenser's logic in explaining the reasons for leaving *The Faerie Queene* aside is sound, it still may not protect him from the displeasure of his "dear dred" Elizabeth Tudor (as the pun on "dear" suggests, the queen here embodies the material reward the poet expects from *The Faerie*

Queene, so disappointing her will spell the collapse of his laureate ambition); whereas neglecting his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle may shatter his dreams of domestic happiness. The meed of “endless honor” promised in the dedicatory sonnet is here put at risk.

One of the subplots of the *Amoretti* then is the poet’s attempt to negotiate a viable writerly space between the two women and the two forms of writing. The consensus among critics seems to be that Spenser is successful in his enterprise, although various readers differ in their understanding of the precise mechanisms regulating the shift. Many read the Petrarchan sequence in the context of the poet’s career in the first half of the 1590s, the years he spent in Ireland as secretary to Lord Grey, where many of the *Amoretti* were presumably written (see Hadfield, *Irish Experience* 17-20). Together with *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, *Fowre Hymnes*, and Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, the *Amoretti* appear to dismantle Spenser’s poetic identity as Elizabeth’s self-appointed laureate, and to cast him instead into the mould of an amateur courtly poet concerned with private affairs and turning away from the public world of poetry and politics. Richard Helgerson, for example, finds in the *Amoretti* a move away from the public office of a laureate and a return to “the pastoral, the personal, and the amorous,” with the poet speaking “in his own person to associate visionary delight with his private love and wearisome duty with the Faerie Queene” (97, 96). Likewise, Louis Montrose stresses Spenser’s ability to resist royal authority, linking it with the poet’s establishment in the works written in the 1590s, including the *Amoretti*, of his domestic domain on the geographical, political, and aesthetic margins of the kingdom (“Domestic Domain” 108-20); whereas Syrith Pugh claims that in the course of the *Amoretti* “the Queen is clearly excluded from this reformed social arrangement ... Elizabeth Boyle rejects the role of Petrarchan ‘Tyranesse’ in favour of reciprocity and greater equality, but Elizabeth Tudor makes no such progress, and ... is effectively ... written out of the poem” (174). Private loving ousts public service, and Elizabeth Boyle displaces Elizabeth Tudor.

For other readers, the *Amoretti* are even more ambitious in that they transcend the dualism of courtliness and laureateship and coin a new poetics in which, as Patrick Cheney writes, Spenser’s “private relation with his beloved returns him to the divine origin of his art,” and “Spenser’s career-

goal implies that he defines lyric poetry (or re-defines it) in careeric terms.” The sequence, through implementing a mode of Petrarchan writing that nourishes his laureate ambition, asserts “the importance of poetry about his future wife – Elizabeth Boyle – to the completion of his national epic – poetry about Elizabeth Tudor” and reconciles “two previously irreconcilable ‘Elizabethan’ poetics: that of Elizabeth Boyle and that of Elizabeth Tudor” (152, 150, 167, 149).³⁸ In other words, whether through supersession or cross-pollination, the conflict between laureateship and courtliness is imagined as settled, and the Langlandian dualism of sovereignty and desire broken; and many commentators interpret the sequence as a steady progress from conflict to resolution, from separation to union, from the physical to the spiritual, from misogyny to mutuality and reciprocity, from public duty to private happiness – in other words, towards a decisive differentiation between the mistress and the queen and a union of the lovers in private happiness.³⁹

The overt development of the plot may indeed see the protagonist secure a promise of mutual love and marriage from his lady. It is suggested, most eloquently, by sonnet LXVII, “Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,” a rewriting of Petrarch’s and Wyatt’s poems of the hind belonging to the Caesar, in which (unlike Wyatt, who is forced to yield his beloved to Caesar) Spenser overcomes the centripetal powers of submission to the monarch’s decree and succeeds in negotiating a conjugal union with his beloved against the desire of the queen (see Prescott; Villeponteaux, “Her Own Will”). Another frequently deployed piece of evidence is the *Epithalamion*, a wedding song appended to the sonnet sequence, with its lush description of the poet’s wedding day and a graphic image of Cynthia (Queen Elizabeth) peeping with jealousy into the bridal chamber (stanza 21). But does such irreversible development indeed take place in the *Amoretti*? Even if we set aside the crucial fact that the

³⁸ Cf. Marotti, “‘Love Is Not Love’” 414; Gil 41. Christopher Warley, arguing from a different methodological perspective, makes a relevant remark: reading the *Amoretti* in the context of English colonial policies in Ireland and the ensuing opportunities for Spenser to acquire land and thus elevate his social status, he argues that “[t]he alternative of seeing Spenser’s work as either belonging to court or to a bourgeois private realm is a false choice . . . [because] it is never entirely clear throughout the work what “system” is dominant” (*Sonnet Sequences* 102-03).

³⁹ This argument is advanced, from various perspectives, in numerous studies: see, for example, Bell 152-84; Blick; Dunlop; Gibbs 139-74; Hardison; Hunter; Johnson, “Gender Fashioning;” Kaske; Kennedy, *Authorizing* 275-80; King, *Spenser’s Poetry* 160-77; Klein 192-93; Pugh 176-77.

Epithalamion is but a supplement, an ancillary to the sequence whose problematic publication history thwarts any attempt to definitively argue whether they were written to be read together or not (see Dubrow, “Re-evaluating” 94), there is evidence to suggest that an identitarian resolution of the conflict between laureateship and courtliness is fantasized but never fully achieved in the *Amoretti* themselves. Against the manifest narrative of the sequence from unrequited love to marital happiness, there is, I argue, the subtle Langlandian logic of meed that charges Spenser’s attempts at a simultaneous deployment of laureate and Petrarchan poetics with uncertainty and even failure. Spenser’s rhetorical choices, narrative decisions, and repeatedly expressed misgivings about the success of the project somewhat belie the professed unidirectional progress of the sequence. As I suggest, this textual undercurrent subverts the linear narrative of the *Amoretti* and, attracting the reader’s attention to the Langlandian genealogy of Spenser’s poems, repeatedly raises questions about the viability of his overarching project of reclaiming the “meed” of courtliness and laureateship from Langland’s disquieted and disquieting grip. If we recognize traces of Langlandian discourse within Spenser’s articulations of poetic selfhood, we can re-imagine the Spenser of the *Amoretti* as a poet much more attuned to the dangers of vernacular discourse and, simultaneously, find answers to some of the interpretive conundrums surrounding the poems, from the cycle’s indecisive teleology and its uneasy sexuality to the lovers’ separation at the end of the sequence as well as Spenser’s relationship with Petrarchism.

In fact, claims that the poetic subject and his beloved progressively undergo spiritual and emotional transformation towards reciprocity, wisdom, and reformed ethics can be countered by a rival assertion, that “[a] steady and consistent trajectory of maturation does not in fact occur either within sections of the 1595 volume or in the relationship among its parts” (Dubrow, *Echoes* 78). Indeed the rhetoric of individual sonnets remains unchanged, with figures of sovereignty (LXXII and LXXXII), captivity (LXXIII), and suffering (LXXXVIII) persisting well into the post-betrothal segment. If reformed, the lover seems uncannily obstinate in clinging to the lexicon of the first part of the

sequence dealing with his “unhappy” state.⁴⁰ At the close of the *Amoretti*, in LXXX, breathing a sigh of relief after completing six books of *The Faerie Queen* (“After so long a race as I have run / Through Faery land, which those six books compile” [1-2]), the poet asks the monarch’s permission to pursue his “second worke,” i.e. “to sport my muse and sing my loves sweet praise” (10) so that he can renew his work on the first poem (“Out of my prison I will breake anew: / and stoutly will that second worke assoyle, / with strong endeavour and attention dew” [6-8]). But this request is followed by a caveat, “But let her praises yet be low and mean / fit for the handmaid of the Faery Queene” (13-14) – Spenser here reinscribes the hierarchy of social relations and of genres, privileging the queen as a social superior to himself and his beloved, and simultaneously belittling the value of the *Amoretti*. Moreover, as Catherine Bates formulates it, in this sonnet “the release he begs for from one Elizabeth is, paradoxically, an extension of his prison term under another Elizabeth” (*Rhetoric* 146); the poet compares working on *The Faerie Queene* with liberation while loving and writing a sonnet sequence is described as a “mew,” if a pleasant one. In other words, the conflict between courtliness and laureateship continues to determine the structure of the *Amoretti* well past the betrothal twist (LXVII). The two types of poetics are not hybridized, nor is one debunked in favor of the other. The promise of the commendatory sonnet is jeopardized by the development of the sequence.

Tellingly, throughout the *Amoretti* many sonnets exhibit suspicion about the status of the poetry Spenser is writing and his suitability for the role he imagines for himself. In the long shadow of Will that hangs over the *Amoretti*, writing is no longer a secure domain that provides Spenser with a coherent social and textual identity; and images of a poet failing at his art abound in the cycle. In XXXVIII, comparing himself unfavorably to Arion, the poet admits that his “rude musick” “cannot, with any skill, / the dreadfull tempest of her wrath appease” (5-7). In these lines, decrying the seductive impotence of his poetry, Spenser is equally troubled by the fact that it fails to appease the wrath of his sovereign-like lady, so that it appears that the Petrarchan poems themselves have stirred the

⁴⁰ It therefore may be no accident or printer error, as Lever has claimed (101), that sonnet XXXV is reprinted almost verbatim as LXXXIII; on the contrary, this move may register the persistence of the earlier forms of discourse and selfhood throughout the *Amoretti*.

horrifying ire of (one of the) Elizabeth(s): “But when in hand my tunelesse harp I take, / then doe I more augment my foes despight: / and greife renew, and passions does awake, / to battaile fresh against my self to fight” (XLIV.9-12). In XLVIII the double-faced addressee consigns Spenser’s poem to the fire (“Innocent paper whom too cruell hand, / Did make the matter to avenge her yre: / and ere she could thy cause wel understand, / did sacrificize unto the greedy fyre” [1-4]), with the poet professing his innocence against heresy and treason: “yet heresy not treason didst conspire, / but plead thy [the poem’s] maisters cause unjustly payned” (XLVIII.7-8). Although he vows to continue writing, he will do so “against her will” (XLVIII.13).

The rhetoric of treason here deserves some further consideration. As we have seen, in Langland the category of meed was tightly linked to sovereign violence; and in Wyatt the speaker’s rivalry with the monarch (whether this rivalry is sexual, economic, or verbal) was likewise predicated on death, something I have suggested could be read through the prism of Henry VIII’s 1534 Treason Act. It is thus intriguing that Spenser invokes his fear of a treason charge at the exact same moment when he contemplates his lady’s reaction to his writing. It betrays, I argue, Spenser’s Langlandian anxiety about his ability to deploy courtliness and laureateship (in order to receive both types of meed) in his text without incurring his sovereign mistress’s anger. Indeed in Spenser’s England misuse of words in the context of sovereignty was a no less dangerous affair than it was in Wyatt’s England. For in 1571 Elizabeth Tudor reinstated the Henrician definition of treason (abolished by Edward VI in 1547) as any harm done to the sovereign by words or writing; moreover, the new statute specified treason as “writing, printing, preaching, speech, express words or sayings” against the sovereign queen (*Tudor Constitution* 74). Actual indictments for treason-by-words were rare, in sharp contrast to Henry’s reign, nor were the biting laws a sufficient deterrent against treasonous, slanderous, or libelous speech (Cressy 62-67; Lemon 10-11), yet the inclemency of the political and legal imagination under Elizabeth provides a useful context for reading Spenser’s fear that his poem may be deemed treasonable. Just like Elizabeth returned to the more ferocious interpretation of treason, Spenser’s text restores the link between the desire of reward and the threat of capital punishment – a link previously

articulated by Langland and Wyatt. For Spenser, as for Wyatt, writing from within a Langlandian triangle of monarchy, desire, and poetry built around the circulation of meed (and thus constructing his identity simultaneously as a courtly poet and a laureate) is a textual strategy that forebodes death. By the same token, the Langlandian genealogy of Spenser's discourse may shed light on a larger framework of violence present in the *Amoretti*. Even a cursory glance at a number of sonnets (VII, XVI, XXIII, XXVII, XXIX, XXXI, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLII, XLVII, XLIX, LIII, and LXIII), many containing sovereign epithets, reveals a disturbing degree of emblematic violence with which Spenser invests the Janus-like addressee of his sonnets and which has proved rather difficult for critics to digest.⁴¹ What my reading suggests is that it is the vernacular memory of discourse that injects a threat of death to the subject into Spenser's sequence: writing between courtliness and laureateship, simultaneously seeking an erotic and pecuniary reward, the speaker of the *Amoretti* uncovers the same danger of sovereign violence that the texts of Langland and Wyatt inscribe in the category of meed.

Language itself, which for Langland and Wyatt functioned as a site of resistance and the ultimate gift a poet can enjoy, for Spenser becomes a mechanism of deprivation and doubt:

Shall I then silent be or shall I speake?
 And if I speake, her wrath renew I shall:
 and if I silent be, my hart will breake,
 or choked be with overflowing gall.
 What tyranny is this both my hart to thrall,
 and eke my tounge with proud restraint to tie?
 that nether I may speake nor thinke at all,
 but like a stupid stock in silence die.

⁴¹ When not ignored altogether (Gibbs; Turner), these images of brutality have been dismissed as parodic of Petrarchism (Bieman; Martz) and aesthetically bankrupt (Kellog 27). They have also been read in light of the violence of England's colonial project in Ireland (Fleming); and one can no doubt find illuminating tools to interpret the cruelty of the *Amoretti* in the theories of linguistic violence subsuming the subject's enjoyment enacted in Petrarchan poetry (Enterline, *Rhetoric*; Marshall 56-84; Vickers, "Diana").

Yet I my hart with silence secretly
 will teach to speak, and my just cause to plead:
 and eke mine eies with meeke humility,
 love learned letters to her eyes to read.
 Which her deep wit, that true harts thought can spel,
 wil soone conceive, and learne to construe well. (XLIII)

The poem records the risks entailed in the Spenserian subject's use of language: if he speaks, his mistress will be incensed ("if I speake, her wrath renew I shall"), but keeping silent will likely be detrimental to his bodily health ("my hart will breake, / or choked be with overflowing gall ... [I will] like a stupid stock in silence die"). Although this linguistic failure is a Petrarchan motif,⁴² in Spenser it takes on an additional meaning. Not only does his sovereign beloved control his body, the tyrannical lady – holding the power to grant and withdraw the authorization for her subjects to speak ("What tyranny is this both my hart to thrall, / and eke my tounge with proud restraint to tie?") – regulates language and thus governs the sphere of public discourse in which the *Amoretti* are written. The gift of language, the poem suggests, is the prerogative of his sovereign mistress. Where Langland and Wyatt undertake writing in this royal language, Spenser instead dreams of developing his own set of signs, signs that would free the space of writing from the Langlandian connotations and resolve his poetic predicament. The introduction of this alternative poetic medium, however, is located in an uncertain future ("will teach ... wil soone conceive"); and this irresolute temporality indicates that Spenser's project of reclaiming language – and meed – to himself remains as yet unfulfilled.

Consequently, the assertive "meed" of the commendatory sonnet increasingly becomes what Spenser himself might have called "a terme unsure" (XXV.3). As the development of the sequence incrementally erodes the originally secure meaning of "meed," the semantic confusion that characterizes Langland's *Mede* percolates through Spenser's poems which are thus forced to critique the initial

⁴² The vision of Petrarch's beloved "which binds his will and from which there is no escaping is obliquely cast in terms of a specifically poetic danger, namely, the danger of losing the poetic voice" (Mazotta 63). See also Braden, *Petrarch Love* 24-27; Enterline, *Rhetoric* 106.

significatory stability of “meed,” exploring other, less confident – and more Langlandian – connotations. In XXIX, the ambiguously Amazonian Elizabeth misreads the symbol of poetic fame as a token of military prowess and appropriates it for herself, depriving the speaker of the meed that he desires and emasculating his office of a poet laureate.⁴³ At the close of the sequence, Spenser blames his mistress’s displeasure on a “[v]enomous tongue,” whose “poysoned words and spitefull speeches” ... “in my true love did stir up coles of yre,” and demands that “[s]hame be thy meed” (LXXXVI.1, 4, 8, 13). It is utterly plausible, as critics suggest, that in the biographical dimension of the sequence Spenser curses an unknown slanderer who spread lies about him (Gibbs 13; Johnson, *Analogies* 242-43), yet the closest parallel to this shaming of the tongue would be Spenser’s own image of the poet Malfont undergoing a degrading punishment for slandering the female ruler in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* (his “tongue was for his trespasse vyle / Nayled to the post, adiudged so by law” [ix.25.2-3]), particularly considering that the situation of this sonnet mirrors the one transpiring in XLVIII, where the poet’s own writing makes his mistress seek “to avenge her yre” (XLVIII.2). Indeed, the tongue, an instrument of poetic eloquence that was supposed to earn the author of the *Amoretti* “endlesse honour,” buys him poetic fame that is drenched with anxiety, uncertainty, and self-doubt.⁴⁴ Semantically, from meed as glory to meed as shame, Spenser in the *Amoretti* repeats the Langlandian journey towards laureate self-negation. It is also remarkable that the vernacular concept of “meed” plays such a crucial role in what is one of Spenser’s most markedly Petrarchan poems, for the invective against the tongue in *Amoretti* LXXXVI may be derived from the *RVF* 49.1-4: “*Perch’ io t’abbia guardata di menzonga / a mio podere et onorato assai, / ingrata lingua, già però non m’ài / renduto onor, ma fatto ira et vergogna*” (“Although I have kept you from lying, as far as I could, and paid you much honor, ungrateful tongue, still you have not brought me honour but shame and anger”). By recasting a Petrarchan emotion in a vernacular form, Spenser introduces into his text the Langlandian anxiety of

⁴³ On Amazonian images in early modern England, including in representations of the queen, see Montrose, *Subject* 154-59; Schleiner, “Divina Virago”; Schwartz, *Tough Love*; Villeponteaux, “Not as Women.”

⁴⁴ On the tongue as an ambivalent organ associated with eloquence and slander, with nobility and depravity, with order and disorder in early modern culture, see Cressy 1-6; Mazzio.

meed and the whole complex of social and economic relations that characterize it in medieval and early Tudor poetry.

Though Spenser claims to invest his courtly poems with the “eternizing” powers that will purchase him and his lady immortality (XXVII, LXXV, LXXXII), the poetics of meed jeopardizes his project of re-writing Petrarch as well. While it is tempting to imagine the *Amoretti* as a re-invention of Petrarch in terms of courtship and mutuality, Spenser’s final product is far from unproblematic. As we remember, Will’s dream of Lady Mede follows a parabolic course bracketed by two climactic expressions of courtly love – that is, Will’s blazon that initiates his unrequited desire for Mede on the one side, and his regretful vocalizing, upon awakening, of renewed erotic longing, on the other. Between these two apexes of formulaic courtliness is a misogynistic narrative that vilifies and denigrates Mede, stigmatizing her as a harlot who corrupts the king, his kingdom, and his subjects. In other words, Will’s dream journey takes him from one situation of Mede’s inaccessibility (opening blazon) to another (final separation), through a long segment of the text where Mede is rendered sexually available to an ever increasing populace of male personages, undoing her courtly inaccessibility. As the early passūs of *Piers Plowman* unfold, the courtly lady mutates into a promiscuous, sexually rapacious common whore, only to be restored, for a fleeting final moment, to her original unattainable status at Will’s awakening.

The narrative of the *Amoretti* tells a disturbingly similar story in similar terms. Ventriloquizing Will’s words, the lover several times stages the Langlandian mise-en-scène of courtly gaze and confesses to *concupiscentia oculorum*:

My hungry eyes through greedy covetize,
still to behold the object of their paine:
with no contentment can themselves suffize
but having pine and having not complaine.
For lacking it they cannot lyfe sustayne,
and having it they gaze on it the more:

in their amazement lyke *Narcissus* vaine
 whose eyes him starv'd: so plenty makes me poore.
 Yet are mine eyes so filled with the store
 of that faire sight, that nothing else they brooke,
 but lothe the things which they did like before,
 and can no more endure on them to looke.
 All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me,
 and all their showes but shadowes saving she. (XXXV)

The “greedy covetize” of his “hungry eyes” is rich with undertones of erotic longing but also with economic aspiration. Although in the couplet Spenser contrasts the image of his beloved to base worldly objects, the vocabulary deployed throughout the poem (“greedy ... suffize ... sustayne ... plenty makes me poore ... store”) presents the beloved herself as an economic commodity that promises to fill the lover’s eyes and warehouses, yet interminably delays the moment of delivering the goods. Equating gaze and desire, Spenser restores the eroticism and commodification of the spectacle that constitutes the structural principle of the Mede episode, as though (unlike Wyatt) claiming the ability to wrestle from Langlandian anxious virtuous forms of visual enjoyment.⁴⁵ Like Will the Spenserian subject claims that his pen “ravisht is with fancies wonderment” (III.12), a dubious Langlandian trope repeated in XXXIX (“my soule was ravisht quite as in a traunce” [10]) and LXXVI (“How was I ravisht with your lovely sight / and my frayle thoughts too rashly led astray?” [5-6]). Even the social difference between speaker and lady (“That being now with her huge brightnesse dazed, / base thing I can no more endure to view” [III.5-6]) echoes Will’s perception of Mede as a noble woman above himself on a social ladder. These Langlandian echoes suggest that Spenser’s Petrarchan subject – undoubtedly characterized by an incomparably more profound and complex interi-

⁴⁵ Like the Middle Ages, the English Renaissance conceived of the spectacle primarily in erotic terms. Anti-theatrical tracts, such as Philip Stubbes’ *Anatomy of Abuses* (1585) and John Rainoldes’ *The Overthrow of Stage Playes* (1599), as well as William Prynne’s *Histriomastix* (1633), instance the early modern assumption that “the basic form of response to theatre is erotic” and that “erotically, theatre is uncontrollably exciting” (Orgel 30).

ority than Will – is nevertheless articulated largely in terms of the vernacular poetics which preserves a memory of Langland’s poem and lends itself to early modern literary utterances concerned with the category of meed. By writing Petrarchan poetry in the English vernacular, Spenser is open to all connotations, welcomed and undesirable, present in the archive of vernacular texts.

One of the most revealing (and indeed troubling) examples of such Langlandian genealogy is *Amoretti XV*:

Ye tradefull Merchants that with weary toyle,
do seeke most pretious things to make your gain:
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,
what needeth you to seeke so farre in vaine?
For loe my love doth in her selfe containe
all this worlds riches that may farre be found;
if Saphyres, loe her eies be Saphyres plaine,
if Rubies, loe hir lips be Rubies found;
If Pearles, hir teeth be pearles both pure and round;
if Yvorie, her forehead yvory weene;
if Gold, her locks are finest gold on ground;
if silver, her faire hands are silver sheene,
But that which fairest is, but few behold,
her mind adornd with vertues manifold.

This poem is an archetypal Renaissance blazon which betrays a fascination with anatomic discovery by dissecting autoptically the female body into an array of separate parts (Sawdy, *Body* 197-201); yet when Spenser’s sonnet compares each member of the lady’s body successively to a precious object, it is to Langland’s description of Mede that it turns in search of the vehicles for its precious tropes. The sapphires, gold, rubies, pearls of Spenser’s beloved are the same riches that adorn Mede’s attire. Even if Spenser here is paraphrasing Petrarchan sonnets by Ronsard and Desportes, as has been sug-

gested,⁴⁶ the vernacular undertones encoded in Spenser's medium cannot be silenced; and Spenser's Englished Petrarchan desire comes across as surreptitiously Langlandian. Inviting the merchants to partake of this visual feast ("loe"), the Spenserian subject replicates Will's blazonic gaze that sexualizes and commodifies Mede. Moreover, not only is the lady sexually attractive to the masculine eye, but her body represents, and even surpasses – as Spenser proudly boasts – the material wealth so craved by the "tradefull Merchants."⁴⁷ The reward his lady promises is therefore both sexual and pecuniary – in other words, a combination we encounter in the allegorical figure of Mede, a personification of material gain and sexual promiscuity. The subject position the poem constructs therefore replicates Will's paralysis at the moment of his optic ravishment by Mede: emotional introspection we associate with Petrarchism and early modern culture in general are notably absent from the text, replaced by the graphically alluring (Langlandian) language of the blazon. As though seeking to undo this damage, the couplet not only privileges the beloved's mind as a Neo-Platonic paragon of intellectual beauty but seeks to play down the visual element of his lady's beauty (her mind is what "few behold"). However, as Roger Kuin has argued in another context, the couplet "seems within the invention of this sonnet quite out of place" and represents a "false" or "fruitless" solution to the poet's problem (33-37). The Langlandian subtext of the poem etched on Spenser's vernacular poetic vehicle proves too resilient to dissolve at the writer's beckoning. Despite the seemingly purifying effect of the final lines, the very language of the poem determines that the lady remains an object of economic and sexual "covetize" for the speaker. Like the trade of his "Merchants," Spenser's search for a non-Langlandian subject position within Langlandian discourse is a kind of "weary toyle ... in vaine."

Indeed love as Spenser treats it in the *Amoretti* displays pernicious qualities dangerously close to Langlandian concupiscence. Similar to the blazonic description of Mede which triggers Will's desire ("[h]ire array me rauysshed; swich richesse saugh I neuere / I hadde wonder what she

⁴⁶ Sidney Lee (xcvi-xcvii) cites Ronsard's *Amours* i.clxxxix and Desportes's *Diane* 1.32 as sources of Spenser's *Amoretti* XV.

⁴⁷ For the poem's lust for colonial wealth imagined in gendered terms, see K. Hall 81-82; Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 111-13.

was and whos wif she were” [B.II.17-18]) and soon disintegrates into a spectacle of sexual and political corruption, Spenser’s cycle becomes increasingly governed by futile attempts to accommodate illicit sexuality. As early as sonnet II Spenser describes his “[u]nquiet thought ... bred / Of th’inward bale of [his] love pined hart” (1-2), lurking within his breast “lyke to vipers brood” (6); and as the sequence progresses, controlling the lover’s erotic longing and bridling his desire become one of the thorniest issues for the speaker. In sonnets VI and VIII, the speaker is at pains to represent his love as “chaste affects” and contrast it with “lusts of baser kynd” (VI.12,3) and “base affections” (VIII.6), something reportedly alien to his angelic beloved. In XXI, however, he admits that his lady has to work hard to put out those looks that “stir up lustes impure” (8), although his heart (he claims) is “burning in flames of pure and chast desyre” (XXII.12). In LXXXIV, the poet returns to the same question of sexual containment:

Let not one sparke of filthy lustfull fyre
 breake out, that may her sacred peace molest:
 ne one light glance of sensuall desyre:
 Attempt to work her gentle mindes unrest. (1-4)

While the beloved is placed outside and above the discourse of base erotic desire, the lover is obviously not immune to the work of sexual yearning; on the contrary, since he is bent to prevent even “one sparke of filthy lustfull fyre” from escaping his control lest his mistress should see “one light glance of sensuall desyre,” these lines reveal the speaker as someone not immune to lust and sin. Like Mede, Spenser’s mistress is an object of sexual interest to himself and other men (as in sonnet XXI, where he refers to others who also look wantonly on her), even if her association with erotic desire is only in the eye of the beholder. Predictably, in LII Spenser’s once vatic “meed” is reduced to his beloved’s bodily presence: “So I her absens will my penaunce make, / that of her presens I my meed may take” (13-14). As in *Piers Plowman*, Spenser’s courtly lady herself (Mede, *donna*), her eroticized body, becomes the lover’s ultimate meed.

This motif reaches its climax in two explicitly sensuous blazons, LXXVI and LXXVII, in which Spenser seeks to reclaim the visual intensity of erotic experience from the compromised status to which they are relegated in Langland's poem. The first of these typifies Spenser's difficult task in the *Amoretti*, namely, his attempts to inoculate the repercussions of the suggestive Langlandian language which Spenser appropriates for writing his Petrarchan sequence:

Fayre bosome fraught with vertues richest tresure,
The neast of love, the lodging of delight:
the bowre of blisse, the paradice of pleasure,
the sacred harbour of that heavenly spright.
How was I ravisht with your lovely sight,
and my frayle thoughts too rashly led astray? (LXXVI.1-6)

The poet invests the beloved's breasts with virtue, but they simultaneously promise "the bowre of blisse, the paradice of pleasure;" and alongside the seductive charge of this figure derived from Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (the "bower of bliss" is the retreat of Acrasia, personification of sexual intemperance), there is a Langlandian intervention at work here. Upon her arrival in London, Mede spends time with various men in her own bower: "gentilliche with joye the justices somme / Busked hem to the bour ther the burde [lady] dwellede" (III.13-14); at the beginning of her trial she is "broughte ... to bour with blisee and with joye" (III.103). Through this Langlandian intertext, Spenser's "bowre of blisse" becomes the site of sinful desire where Mede – as sexual reward – can be enjoyed. In contrast to the repulsive attractiveness of Mede, Spenser's lover extols his lady's "lovely sight," but like Will he is "ravisht" by the spectacle of her provocative body, his "frayle" thoughts being "too rashly led astray." The couplet ("Sweet thoughts I envy your so happy rest, / which oft I wisht, yet never was so blest" [13-14]) again betrays the speaker's anxiety about his ability to control his sexual appetite. As Mede is stripped of her courtliness and turned into a whore, Spenser's beloved descends from the throne of detached, chaste adoration and becomes an object of sensuous passion.

As in sonnet XV (“Ye tradefull Merchants”), the lady’s attraction in blazons LXXVI and LXXVII is not exclusively erotic. Like Medea, she represents material, economic riches to the speaker. Her virtue is “riches tresure” (LXXVI.1) while her breasts are “two golden apples of unvalued price” that lie in a silver dish on “that table . . . so richly spread” (LXXVII.5-6, 13). In fact, whenever Spenser chooses to compose a blazon of his beloved, the ambiguity of Langlandian language becomes apparent. In LXXXI Spenser, returning to the mercantile rhetoric of sonnet XV, compares her breast (an erotic fetish) to a ship loaded with expensive goods (an economic object): “Fayre when her brest lyke a rich laden barke, / with pretious merchandize she forth doth lay” (5-6); and her mouth becomes “the gate with pearles and rubyes richly dight” (10). Signally, of the eight times Spenser uses the Langlandian-inflected word “rich” in the *Amoretti*, five occur in the blazons that draw explicit parallels between erotic and economic reward (XV, LXXVI, LXXVII, and LXXXI); one in the poem that arguably gives voice to the lady where she raises concerns over the frailty of all flesh (LVIII), and one in sonnet LXXVIII cited above where “riches” become the meed the speaker receives from his sovereign. This suggests that the Langlandian questions inscribed in the vernacular continue to press English poets even in Petrarchan settings.

Even the impending marriage between lover and lady is tainted with Langlandian connotations. Rather than a circumvention of Petrarchan sensuality, a re-channeling of accursed “lust impure” into the institution of legitimate Protestant loving based on mutuality and on acceptance of conjugal sexuality,⁴⁸ the discourse of marriage that enters the sequence after the betrothal sonnet (LXVIII) appears to raise the degree of anxiety about sexuality rather than assuage it. As Gibbs formulates it, the speaker “is just as prone to sensual thoughts at the end of the sequence as he was at the beginning . . . [i]f anything, lustful thoughts increase towards the end” (17). The plot development from unrequited passion to betrothal to marital happiness in “the bowre of blisse, the paradice of pleasure”

⁴⁸ As Mary Beth Rose writes, “[a]lthough Protestant sexual discourse retains much of the erotic skepticism of the dualistic sensibility, it nevertheless unites love with marriage and conceives of marriage with great respect as the foundation of an ordered society” (4). On Protestant ideas of marriage see also A. Fletcher; on Spenser’s *Amoretti* as an embodiment of these ideas, see King, *Spenser’s Poetry* 160-77; Klein 188-215.

(LXXVI.3) paints the image of the beloved in ever more titillating terms. That the marriage motif in Spenser's volume is ambiguous is suggested by the presence of the sexually charged Anacreontics alongside the *Epithalamion*, the two sets of verse representing two avenues that desire can take, to adopt Spenser's own terminology, "base" and "chaste" (cf. Bates, *Rhetoric* 148). In both, however, the lady can be known carnally by the speaker, and despite the apparent legitimacy of one and the illicitness of the other, the mechanics of desire remain analogous in both. It is thus not clear whether the marriage celebrated in the *Epithalamion* can effectively counter the Mede-like sexual appeal of the lady. As we recall, Langland's Will treats marital sex with suspicion. Heather Dubrow, for example, finds a structural parallel to Spenser in Barnabe Barnes' *Parthenophil and Parthenope* (1593), a cycle that concludes with a pornographic canzona in which the lover-poet rapes his beloved (*Echoes* 80). Barnes, as it were, makes explicit a motif that is only implied in Spenser's *Amoretti*, where the Langlandian seductiveness of meed continues to underwrite, disturbingly, the marriage sub-plot.

Symptomatically, Spenser ends the *Amoretti* by thrusting his speaker into the very same position occupied by Will at the conclusion of the Mede episode. Having followed Mede from blazonic glory to the depths of turpitude, Will wakes up alone, exasperated he has not seen more of Mede. This is exactly what happens to the Spenserian subject in the last sonnets of the *Amoretti* (LXXXVII-LXXXIX). Their tone is somber; the dejected lover is again deprived of the presence of his love and lacks the comfort of her light. "Lyke as the Culver on the bared bough / Sits mourning for the absence of her mate,"

So I alone now left disconsolate,
 mourne to my selfe the absence of my love:
 and wandring here and there all desolate,
 seek with my playnts to match that mournful dove.
 Ne joy of ought that under heaven doth hove,
 can comfort me, but her owne ioyous sight:
 whose sweet aspect both God and man can moue,

in her unspotted pleasauns to delight. (LXXXIX.1-2, 5-12)

One of the most enigmatic details of the *Amoretti*, this carefully choreographed final separation of the lovers displays a distinctive Langlandian mark. Spoken from a position which resembles the original stance of the *Amoretti* more than its alleged “happy ending” anticipated by the *Epithalamion*, the poem suggests that Elizabeth Boyle, like Will’s Meed and Wyatt’s “hynde,” is after all placed beyond the lover’s reach. The speaker and his mistress are separated again; and having gone from Petrarchan desolation to an assurance of conjugal bliss, the *Amoretti* return to the ground zero of all courtly writing, a lover pining hopelessly for his unattainable beloved.

This also marks a return to pre-reformed, unrequited Petrarchism: *Amoretti* LXXXIX (as well as the whole last cluster of separation sonnets) appears to be derived from *RVF* 59, where the lover is barred from the sweet sight (“*la dolce vista*” [59.12]) of his lady. For Spenser, the reversed fortunes of the lover mean that the pain and suffering of the earlier sonnets return, and whatever resolution the *Epithalamion* may hold in store, the *Amoretti* end abruptly on a note of Petrarchan – or shall I say Langlandian? – despair, for a stock Petrarchan scenario of separation is here again dubbed onto a vernacular textual positionality.⁴⁹ As Will’s distress is associated with unquenched *concupiscentia oculorum*, with not having seen enough of Mede, so it is the impossibility of *seeing* more of his beloved that the Spenserian lover finds the most agonizing. Indeed, in LXXXIII, the doubled sonnet that holds the sequence together and demonstrates how little the subject has changed over the course of the *Amoretti*, the speaker makes one final reference to *Piers Plowman*, admitting the “greedy covetize” of his eyes.

In other words, if Spenser attempts to critique and re-write his Petrarchan model, it is Langland who supplies the vehicle for the Elizabethan poet’s experiment. His sonnet sequence is not so much an irreversible movement “away from the restlessness of Petrarchan love and toward the peace and rest Spenser finds in the sacred world of marriage” (Dasenbrock 48) as it is an exploration of the

⁴⁹ For the argument that the open-ended conclusion is a characteristic of not only Spenser’s sequence but of English Renaissance sonnet sequences in general, see Neely 375-6.

darker, unsettling side of courtly love, as well as a reluctant admission of the poems' Langlandian genealogy. Yet, if Langland's poetics of meed proves deleterious to Spenser's project of courtly writing, these failings are tightly intertwined with the shortcomings of Spenser's poetic role as a laureate. Trapped between his love for Elizabeth Boyle and his service to Elizabeth Tudor, Spenser creates an ambiguously open-ended text that stumbles over Will's irresolvable dilemma, that is, the difficulty of leveling literary authority and erotic desire. Forced to write between Mede and the King, Will watches both projects disintegrate, his courtly love deconstructed and rewritten as bitter satire and his laureateship enterprise undone by a paroxysmal return to courtly love. Reconfiguring this conflict in an Elizabethan setting, Spenser has no choice but to leave the outcome of his poetic project undetermined: if Spenser's restoration of Petrarchan distance at the close of the sequence is a sign that he continues to insist upon private loving and to oppose his sovereign, it spells the end of his laureate career because the sequence turns into a satire of the public Petrarchism of Elizabeth Tudor; if, inversely, the return to unrequited love is the result of his submission to royal will, it signals the failure of his experimental version of a Reformed Petrarchism. In either case, it is an admission that the Spenserian subject has been unsuccessful at what he set off to achieve in the *Amoretti*: the plan to negotiate courtliness and laureateship has run aground, and the individual projects of reforming Petrarch and glorifying Elizabeth Tudor turn out to be sustainable only through poetic and personal loss. As a Langlandian text, the *Amoretti* exemplify the perennial elusiveness of reward and the devastating repercussions of the poetics of meed for those who attempt to practice it, so that in the end Langlandian uncertainty crowns Spenser's poetic ambition.

But prior to Spenser the poet who performs this role of anti-laureate and anti-courtly writer is Wyatt, whose poetic subject discovers, through pain, that the semantic ambiguity, or rather vacuity of meed (is it a noble royal reward? a corrupting bribe? gratification of sexual desire? the gift of death? a word? a woman?) cannot be assimilated by poetic discourse: in any incarnation, it will reserve its multifarious sexual and political connotations. To try to stabilize the ever shifting, disseminating meaning of meed is "in a nett . . . to hold the wynde." Much as Langland, Wyatt, and Spenser may

want to put an end to this semantic fluctuation, meed is never firm or stable as it engenders at least two kinds of discourse, courtliness (meed as erotic reward) and laureateship (meed as economic and poetic reward), depriving the poets of a possibility to choose decisively and terminally one over the other, let alone reconcile the two. The result for all three English poets is the profound uncertainty of meed as a gift of poetry.

Chapter Two

Chaucerian Melancholy in Early Modern England:

Surrey's *Songes and Sonettes* and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*

In a famous passage from his *Apology for Poetrie*, Sir Philip Sidney reflects upon the lamentable state of contemporaneous English poetry, contrasting it unfavourably with the splendour of the days gone by and looking nostalgically to the past. He wonders

why England (the Mother of excellent mindes) should bee growne so hard a step-mother to Poets, who certainly in wit ought to passe all other ... That Poesie, thus embraced in all other places, should onely finde in our time a hard welcome in England, I thinke the very earth lamenteth it, and therefore decketh our Soyle with fewer Laurels then it was accustomed. For heertofore Poets haue in England also flourished ... And now ... an ouer-faint quietnes should seem to strew the house for Poets.

(193-94)

It is an open question whether Sidney expects his readers to apply this verdict of poetic degradation to the author himself, as is whether this lamentation is anything more than a complex role-playing strategy which within the textual economy of the treatise involves asserting and undermining the speaker's rhetorical position.¹ What is more intriguing is the choice of poets that Sidney exempts

¹ Several pages later Sidney describes himself as "sick among the rest" and forfeits any right to "teach poets how they should do" (119). Together with the notion that Sidney's pursuit of a literary career was a compensation for his political failures (as Sidney's biographer expresses it, Sidney "must have made a deliberate decision to seek in literature and literary patronage the fulfillment and autonomy that were lacking elsewhere" [Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney* 222]), which inevitably renders suspect his commitment to any forms of courtly literature (cf. Kinney, "Puritans;" Sinfield, "Cultural Politics"), Sidney's claims suggest that he is willing to sabotage his own writing. Recently, however, it has been argued that the *Apology* "does not subordinate courtly pleasure to Protestant politics, but defends the court from Protestant criticisms of its pleasures, including criticisms of poetry" (Matz, *Defending* 58). For the rhetorical ambivalence of Sidney's *Apology*, see Barnes; Levao.

from censure and allows into his exemplary vernacular canon. Among those “that haue poetically sinewes in them,” as Sidney phrases it, he names two relatively new texts and two poets of the past:

Chaucer, vndoubtedly, did excellently in hys *Troylus* and *Cresseid*; of whom, truly, I know not whether to meruaile more, either that he in that mistie time could see so clearely, or that wee in this cleare age walke so stumblingly after him. Yet had he great wants, fitte to be forgiuen in so reuerent an antiquity. I account the *Mirroure of Magistrates* meetely furnished of beautiful parts; and in the Earle of Surries *Liricks* many things tasting of a noble birth, and worthy of a noble minde. The *Sheapheards Kalendar* hath much Poetrie in his Eglogues: indeede worthy the reading, if I be not deceiued. (196)

Given the melancholic rhetoric of motherhood and originary loss Sidney employs to describe the barren poetic landscape around him (“...why England (the Mother of excellent mindes) should bee growne so hard a step-mother to Poets”), such reverence towards the dead Chaucer and Surrey hardly comes as a surprise. The institutionalization of Chaucer as the father of English poetry, as a canonical literary entity, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was inextricably linked, as Thomas A. Prendergast has argued in *Chaucer’s Dead Body* (17-70), with “an aesthetics of melancholia” – the process of mourning Chaucer’s death and supplying, as it were, the body of his works in lieu of his dead body. But what precisely does Sidney the poet invest in this melancholic bridging of past and present that we find in Sidney the critic? Is this allusion to Chaucer’s authority by an Elizabethan poet – one virtually ubiquitous among mid- and late-Tudor writers and theorists² – merely a rhetorical figure recruited by the vernacular desperately in need of a legitimatizing pedigree, one which ultimately attests to an incommensurability between Chaucer’s medieval poetics and the early modern literary strate-

² Sidney echoes the dedicatory Preface from Tynne’s 1532 edition of *The workes of Geffray Chaucer*: it is “moche to be marueyled, howe in his tyme, whan doubtlesse all good letters were layde a slepe throughout the world ... such an excellent poete in our tongue shulde as it were (nature repugnyng) spryng and aryse” (Aii^v).

gies?³ Does the shift in writerly and readerly attitudes to Chaucer that occurs at the end of the fifteenth century – an historicizing distancing of the Chaucerian canon as a past recoverable through restorative humanist explication but no longer open to direct imitation (Lerer, *Readers* 147-208), one that entails “the gradual closing down of the Chaucerian text and the increasing difficulty of ‘writing’ Chaucer ... directly and unabashedly” (Trigg, *Congenial Souls* 111) – preclude early modern poets from engaging with Chaucerian poetics the way Hoccleve and Lydgate did? Or does the vernacular genealogy Sidney imagines to run from Chaucer through Surrey to himself endorse a definable relevance that the Chaucerian text possessed for the early modern age, Sidney included?⁴

Even if we do not take Sidney’s remarks about Surrey and Chaucer at face value, I suggest that they deserve our attention. My argument, in short, is that in *Astrophil and Stella* Sidney deploys a distinctly Chaucerian form of writing: constructing his poetic subject through a series of negotiations between lover and poet, desiring and writing, and, ultimately, Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism, Sidney re-activates the mode of discourse that Chaucer crafts in his early courtly poems, especially the *Book of the Duchess*.⁵ Chaucer’s poem models a subject who externalizes and objectifies his erotic desire by creating, and then misinterpreting, the figure of a lovesick knight that serves as a counterpoint to the speaker’s own disturbed condition. This Chaucerian poetics presented Renaissance readers and writers, Sidney among them, with a mode of discourse in which the production of amorous verse takes place alongside its radical critique, a mode which, I argue, is directly linked to the mechanisms of melancholy.

³ For example, Carol Martin, discussing the implicit theorizing in Chaucer’s *House of Fame* and contrasting it with Sidney’s *Apology*, claims: “the Renaissance uneasiness with the *House of Fame* reflects a fundamental hermeneutical discord between the indeterminacy of Chaucer’s paradox-oriented dialectics, rooted in the discipline of rhetoric, and the truth claims of the more usually employed dialectics of scholastic philosophy ... Chaucer’s poetic, rhetorical dialectics allowed the hermeneutical impetus of his argument to remain open to readerly and editorial interpolation in ways that Sidney’s scholastic treatise could not” (40-41).

⁴ As Thomas Greene remarks in *Poets and Princepleasers*, in terms of courtly aesthetics, “the line between [Chaucer and Sidney] ... is unbroken” (12).

⁵ I have chosen, despite Sidney’s remarks, for my discussion the *Book of the Duchess* rather than *Troilus* because of the former’s compactness (in contrast to the five-book romance that would probably require a separate study) as well as of its direct engagement with the discourse of melancholy.

At the same time, I propose, Sidney's access to Chaucerian subjectivity is mediated by the poetry of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Readily available to late-sixteenth century readers in Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes written by the right honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other* (1557),⁶ a copy of which in all probability was in Philip Sidney's household library,⁷ Surrey's verse solidifies the Chaucerian positionality of a melancholy speaker dispersed between loving and writing and alienated from his poetic language. While Chaucerian interventions in Tottel's *Miscellany* have been recently emphasized by critics (Lerer, *Courtly Letters* 161-207; Ros-siter 108), Sidney's interest in the collection has never been taken seriously. Anne Ferry, discussing *Songes and Sonettes*, seconds the collection's links with Chaucerian legacy, stating that its "association with Troilus shows that the tradition was well established before it met with the conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence; both trace back to the common roots in troubadour poetry" (73). When it comes to Tottel's (and thus, indirectly, Chaucer's) impact on Sidney's sonneteering, however, Ferry is less permissive: observing that Sidney's reference to "Earl of Surrey's *Lyrics*" is likely to be his tribute to the collection as a whole, she argues that Sidney's "own verse, however, shows no sign of direct imitation of Surrey, or Wyatt" (119). William Kennedy in *The Site of Petrarchism* argues that Sidney's estimate of Surrey is the product of class consciousness: "The terms in which he canonizes Surrey as one of the nation's premier poets along with Chaucer and Spenser reflect his aristocratic perspective... In *Astrophil and Stella*, however, we find that Sidney does exactly the opposite. He echoes the energy and dynamism of Wyatt's lyrics at the expense of Surrey's polish" (203).⁸

⁶ Tottel's *Miscellany* (as it is commonly known) contains poems by Surrey, Wyatt, Nicholas Grimald, and a number of "uncertain auctours." Originally published by the London printer Richard Tottel in June 1557, it was reprinted in July 1557, in 1559 (twice), in 1565 (twice), in 1567, 1574, and 1585. For publication history, see also Marquis, Introduction and "Politics and Print;" Marotti, *Manuscript* 212-19; Wall 23-30.

⁷ See Warkentin, "Sidney's Authors" 75, 85.

⁸ Earlier critics (Forster 133; Lewis 236; Mason 255) dismiss Tottel's *Miscellany* as a dead end of earlier tradition rather than a harbinger of the Elizabethan age, driving a wedge between the first and the second generations of Renaissance English Petrarchans (that is, between Surrey and Sidney). I draw, instead, on Wendy Wall's re-evaluation of the collection as a source of productive poetic strategies for later sixteenth-century writers, as "*the handbook for Elizabethan poets ... codifying the graceful maneuvers of courtship while also explaining and amplifying the practices of courtiership*"

Even those critics who argue that Surrey represented for Sidney a chivalric and rhetorical paragon of English nobility still find Wyatt's poetic style more germane to the project of *Astrophil and Stella* (Heale, *Wyatt* 194; Sessions, "Wyatt's Surrey" 179-80). The one critic to grant that Surrey's verse – and not just his social status – had any significant effect on Sidney is Andrew Hadfield, who notes that "[i]n many ways Surrey was the obvious choice for Sidney to use as a model for the lyric," including the Henrician poet's being "keen to experiment with numerous forms of versification," his oscillation "between a military career and a literary one," and, most importantly, his "self-conscious nationalism" as a poet (*Literature* 143-48). Developing Hadfield's remarks, I intend to demonstrate that it is not just a noble birth, together with the ideals of chivalric virtue and heroic love, that Sidney and Surrey share but a poetic mind as well, a literary self that derives its lineage from Chaucer's courtly melancholy, with its characteristic attitudes to the instability of courtly identity and poetic language. Chaucerian subjectivity provides a vernacular template for the poetic voice found in Surrey's section of Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* and, through it, in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (which, in its turn, was a collection of a collection of songs and sonnets⁹), consolidating the reflective, self-questioning roots of English Petrarchism into a mode of writing haunted by vernacular melancholy.

"Thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse:" Discerning the Chaucerian

Subject

The Book of the Duchess is the first of Chaucer's major poems. Believed by most modern scholars (and, evidently, by early modern readers, as John Stowe's note in the margins of the Fairfax

(24, 107). See also Warkentin, "Meeting," where she argues that poetic collections like Tottel's that "centered on the poet's public analysis of his own creativity," though generally conceived to have been shaped by Sidney and Watson, were already known to mid-Tudor poets and thus available to sonneteers like Sidney (19-21).

⁹ Sidney refers to love poetry as "that lyrical kind of *songs and sonnets*" (*Apology* 201, emphasis added), a generic label applied to Sidney's own poetry by Abraham Fraunce on the title page of his 1588 *Arcadian Rhetorike*, which "is made plaine by examples ... out of ... *Sir Philip Sydnieis Arcadia, songs and sonets*." The title *Astrophil and Stella* first appears in the 1591 edition of Thomas Newman (*Syr P.S. his Astrophel and Stella. Wherein the excellence of sweete Poesie is concluded*).

MS of the poem suggests [*The Riverside Chaucer* 966]) to have been written by Chaucer for John of Gaunt, in order to commemorate the death (or an anniversary thereof) of Gaunt's first wife Blanche of Lancaster who died of plague in 1368 or 1369, the poem has attracted a good deal of historically grounded interpretation. My interest, however, does not lie in tracing conflicting external and internal evidence regarding the circumstances of the poem's composition, although its courtly sensibility (deriving partly from the historical setting of the text) offers a crucial tool for understanding Chaucer's poem. Rather, what I seek to discern in Chaucer's text is its structure of poetic subjectivity emerging in dialogue with courtly poetics.

The *Book* is written in the first person (it was known to Renaissance readers as the *Dreame of Chaucer* in William Thynne's and Thomas Speght's editions of 1532 and 1598 respectively), but its complex, multi-layered narratorial organization denies any open-and-shut determinacy as to the poem's subject position. It opens with a complaint of the narrator, a man who for the past eight years has been afflicted with a mysterious malady that keeps him insomniac, disturbed, and melancholic (1-29). The reasons for his suffering remain unclear even to the speaker ("Myselven can not telle why / The sothe" [34-35]), and he declares that the only cure that could help is unavailable to him: "For there is phisicien but oon / That may me hele; but that is don" (39-40). To while away the night, he asks for a book of "romaunce" (i.e. most likely a French text) to be brought to him (44-61), in which he reads the Ovidian story of Ceyx and Alcyone (62-214). Upon finishing the tale, he prays to the gods of sleep and finally goes into uneasy slumber accompanied by a most peculiar dream (215-90). In his dream he finds himself, on a bright May morning, in a room in which windows and walls are decorated with scenes from courtly literature from the story of Troy to the *Romance of the Rose* (291-343). Hearing a hunting horn, the dreamer rides out and witnesses a hunt for the "hert" in progress. The "hert" steals away from all the hunters, however, and the dreamer wanders into a forest (387-442) where he encounters a knight dressed in black – a young nobleman stricken with grief and complaining to himself about the loss of his beloved (445-86). The rest of the poem consists of a series of verbal exchanges between the dreamer and the Man in Black: the former inquires about the causes for

the latter's distress and attempts to offer consolation, but repeatedly fails to comprehend the elaborate allegories of desire and death interspersed with a handful of courtly lyrics that the Man in Black offers as an explanation for his miserable state. Relying heavily on the rhetoric of French courtly poetry (de Machaut and Froissart),¹⁰ the Man in Black gives account of his amorous education, courtship of, and marriage to his lady White (probably the anglicized form of Blanche), as well as of her untimely death, the main reason for the Man in Black's distress. It takes the dreamer a while to realize this, but after the final moment of recognition, with the hunt over, the two men part, the dreamer awakens still holding the Ovid in his hand, and sets "to put this sweven [dream] in ryme" (1332).

Although the first-person pronoun is appropriated by a number of personages (the Ovidian characters, gods, hunters etc.), the primary contenders for the status of poetic subject in the *Book of the Duchess* are the dreamer and the Man in Black, with the evident centrality of the lovelorn knight countered by the meta-narrative powers of the otherwise vacuous dreamer. As I would like to suggest, the "I" of the poem is the product of a tension between these two speakers; their tortuous relation with each other, with the discourse of melancholy, and with the language of French courtly poetry engenders a distinct form of Chaucerian subjectivity which remains viable in English poetry at least until the late sixteenth century.

With this rupture in the poetic self being so easily identifiable, it might be tempting to discuss the dreamer and the Man in Black in diacritical terms, as non-lover/lover, reader/poet, gentleman/aristocrat, anti-courtly/courtly, original/conventional, English/French. It is indeed not difficult to conceptualize the narrator and the black knight as opposites: while the Man in Black is consumed by love and grief, and while his preferred means of communication is the refined language of French courtly poetry, the dreamer appears to lack any kind of amorous or literary experience and to comprehend only colloquial English (for instance, the fact of White's death, first mentioned in the Man in

¹⁰ French courtly poetry provides more than half the content and rhetoric of Chaucer's dream vision. His primary sources are Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose*, Froissart's *Le Paradys d'Amours*, and de Machaut's *Le Dit de la Fonteinne Amoreuse*, *Remede de Fortune*, and *Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*. See Windeatt 3-72; Wimsatt.

Black's courtly poem, has to be put bluntly to him by way of unadulterated Germanic vocabulary and syntax, "She ys ded!" [1309]). David Lawton has characterized the narrator as neither a lover nor, "until the very end, a poet," which contrasts drastically with Chaucer's French sources where, by convention of *dit amoureux*, the speaker is expected to perform both roles (*Chaucer's Narrators* 53). Likewise, any historicist reading of the poem is bound to acknowledge the social gulf separating the aspiring narrator and his patron, John of Gaunt, whom the former seeks to console and please.¹¹ Finally and most importantly, the *Book of the Duchess* can be imagined as Chaucer's ironic critique, even ridicule, of the French norms of love and of literary courtliness. By misunderstanding (or pretending to misunderstand) the black knight, the dreamer exposes the unoriginality and communicative impotence of the nobleman's poetic language. Chaucer breaks the crust of French tradition and establishes an English courtly poetic identity, as both classical and modern studies of the poem tell us.¹²

¹¹ See, however, Strohm ("Politics" 107), who suggests that the dominant force in their exchange is the civility displayed by two gentlepersons of similar if not equal social rank. For Barbara Nolan, in contrast, the very disjunction between the dreamer and the Man in Black opens up possibilities for non-aristocratic critique of elitist courtly culture (221-22).

¹² "The style of the *Book of the Duchess*, then, shows two concurrent movements in the light of French tradition: one toward a functional use of courtly convention, the other towards a realism that suggests comic disenchantment" (Muscatine 107); "The poem is about what Chaucer might want from poetry but cannot yet say ... there was no ... place for the real expression of passion in the courtly prison from which Chaucer had not yet escaped" (I. Robinson 17, 41); by his "audacious and parodic expropriation of French materials," Chaucer "distances himself from, and thereby calls into serious question, the rich tradition of narrative authority that had so fully shaped the directions of French narrative and lyric poetry throughout the Middle Ages" (Nolan 205); "[The poem] records the emergence of a courtly English poetic identity that is conceived both alongside and as a replacement for French precedents ... [It is] a foundational act of English poetry that at once acknowledges its French predecessors and resists what these models stand for" (Williams, *French Fetish* 25, 31); "The man in black summons the cadences and expressions of traditional French love poetry to pay tribute to his lost lady, yet remains incapable of producing fresh, vivid expressions ... The change between dreamer and man in black reconstructs the maturing of a poet, his emancipation from a clichéd genre that had long lost its vitality" (Condren 37).

Recently, however, Calin (*French Tradition* 269-370) has argued that Chaucer's major achievements owe a significant debt to the French tradition: "Chaucer, his friends, and his disciples all read French and were steeped in the tradition. As inspiration for their own texts in English and in order to write in English, they turned to the French. Furthermore, in the course of their writing lives, the poets in English did not shake off or renounce the French legacy" (272). For perceptive discussions of this "rhetoric of liberation" in Chaucer criticism, see Schibanoff 3-23, 29-41. See also Butterfield (269-91), who alerts us to the fact that contrasting Chaucer's Englishness with his French sources presupposes stable national and language identities, which is at odds with the linguistic and cultural complexities of the later XIV century.

That may well be the case, and Chaucer's metapoetic agenda is hardly an issue here. As Robert Edwards has shown, throughout the poem Chaucer does engage in literary reflection and ventures to explore the nature of poetry (1-91), although dream poetry as genre often "becomes a device for expressing the poet's consciousness of himself as a poet and for making his work reflexive" (Spearing, *Dream-Poetry* 4-6). Taking into account in how many aspects the *Book of the Duchess* departs from both its French prototypes and the genre of dream vision as a whole (consider, for example, its hypertrophied waking section, its conspicuous absence of an authority figure functioning as a guide for the dreamer, and a shortage of allegorical characters), the poem's primary concern may well be with the limitations of poetic discourse rather than with the events and people it purportedly describes. What better way indeed is there to explore a metapoetic angle of courtly poetry than to pull lover and writer apart and equip the latter with a mind capable of incisive critique of the flaws inherent in the former's discourse?

But are the roles in the *Book of the Duchess* really so rigidly assigned? Are we indeed dealing here with writer and lover, the one immune to desire and therefore poetically more agile, the other consumed by love and blind to the inefficiency of his poetic means? Perhaps the urge to differentiate so sharply between dreamer and black knight in terms of their love experience and poetic originality partly stems from the tendency to extrapolate onto the *Book of the Duchess* the characteristics of Chaucer's other courtly narratives, most prominently the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹³ Meanwhile, the structure of the poetic "I" in the *Book of the Duchess* is significantly more

¹³ In the *Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator and, subsequently, dreamer insists that he is not a lover, and everything he knows about love comes from the books he reads, "For al be that I knowe nat Love in dede, / Ne wot how that he quiteth folk hir hyre, / Yet happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede" (8-10); and his dream is supposed to provide him with material to write, as his dream guide promises ("I shal the shewe mater of to write" [168]). Likewise, *Troilus* features a narrator suspicious of love: "For I, that God of Loves servantz serve, / Ne dar to Love, for myn unlikynesse, / Preyen for speed, al sholde I therfore sterve, / So fer am I from his help in derknesse" (I.15-18). The task of the speaker, then, becomes to report the tribulations of ill-starred lovers, a writerly position that opens endless possibilities for extracting himself from, and meditating critically upon, the lovers' discourse, although in later books it becomes increasingly problematic to distinguish the voice of the narrator from those of his characters (for a useful overview of the problem, see Spearing, *Subjectivity* 68-100). Based on these texts, the splitting of the poetic subject can be seen as a kind of Chaucer's trademark.

complex. The narrator-turned-dreamer already suggests a split identity (rather than a coherent antithesis to the black knight), but there is also a number of puzzling similarities between the dreamer and the Man in Black, what Louise O. Fradenburg has described as the “relations of replication,” which constitute a form of transcendence between the two (*Sacrifice* 100). Both are masculine subjects, and yet “[e]ach, in his own way, is feminized – shown or said to be like actual women, with womanly characteristics, or put in positions defined by the poem and by other discourses of the period as feminine positions” (Hansen 61, see 60-68). The narrator identifies with Alcyone, the female character of the “romaunce” he reads, and imitates her sorrow and her actions (95-100, 231-69) whereas the black knight is so engrossed in his grief that he identifies with his deceased lady White, up to a point where he passes out in an attempt to re-create her death and therefore her bodily form (“Hys sorwful hert gan faster faynte / And his spirites waxen dede; / The blood was fled for pure drede” [488-90]). Additionally, his excessive mourning bordering on self-destruction echoes that of Alcyone, who, having discovered that her husband is dead, dies from sorrow (213-14); and at one point he compares himself to Cassandra (“That trewly Cassandra ... / Had never swich sorwe as I thoo” [1246, 1249]).

Further, both men display signs of what appears to be a form of melancholia (Kruger 64-69), although whether they suffer from the same species of the malady is contestable. The opening to the poem meticulously catalogues the narrator’s many symptoms – lack of sleep (“for day ne nyght / I may not slepe wel nygh noght” [2-3]), loss of interest in life (“I take no kepe / Of nothing” [6-7]), phantasmatic workings of downcast imagination (“For sorwful ymagynacioun / Ys always hooly in my mynde” [14-15]) – which, even prior to his ruthless self-diagnosis, are sufficient to suggest that we are faced with a case of melancholy: “...and thus melancolye / And drede I have for to dye” (23-24). For some critics this is love melancholy (Lawlor 637), a reading corroborated by Chaucer’s close rendering in these lines of his primary source, Froissart’s *Paradys d’Amours*, narrated by a sleepless

For example, John Lydgate, a self-proclaimed fifteenth-century Chaucerian, in his *Complaynt of Loveres Lyfe* (a loose imitation of the *Duchess*) renders even more palpable the distance between the two aspects of the Chaucerian poetic self by containing the narrator’s desire (although he describes himself as a lover, he never elaborates on his own feelings) and avoiding any interplay between him and the complaining lover.

and sick courtly lover. Others, however, refuse to apply automatically the mechanics of the French text to the *Book of the Duchess*, suggesting that the narrator in fact is a clinical case of “head melancholy” (Hill 38-43) or *melancholia canina*, a form of lycanthropy (Heffernan 41).

Little controversy surrounds what ails the Man in Black, however. As narrator says,

And he was clothed al in blak
.....
... he heng hys hed adoun,
And with a dedly sorwful soun
He made of rym ten vers or twelve –
Of a compleynte to hymselfe –
The moste pitee, the moste rowthe,
That ever I herde; for, by my trowthe,
Hit was gret wonder that Nature
Myght suffre any creature
To have such sorwe, and be not ded.
Ful pitous pale and nothyng red,
He sayd a lay. (457, 461-71)

Dressed in black, pale, emaciated, with a mark of profound sorrow on his face, the black knight epitomizes pre-modern melancholy. As the reader soon discovers, the cause of his melancholy is the loss of his beloved wife, White, a traumatic event that places him past all cure: neither poetry nor music nor entertainment nor medicine (“Ne hele me may phisicien, / Noght Ypocras, ne Galyen”) can help him (567-72). The toll this bereavement has placed on the knight is heavy. Like the dreamer, the Man in Black suffers from insomnia (“my slep [ys] wakyng” [611]), apathy (“My lyf, my lustes, be me lothe, / For al welfare and I be wroothe” [581-82]), and an acute death wish (“That me ys wo that I was born!” [566]).

Assuming how profound Chaucer's knowledge of contemporary medical discourse appears to have been (see Heffernan 38-65), an investigation into the particularities of different kinds of melancholy is well worth the pursuit (and I shall return to this in the next section). What I want to stress at this point, however, is the similarities between the symptoms displayed by narrator and black knight, which once again questions the distance separating these two "I"s. In addition to shared symptomatology, there is an important etiological affinity between the two cases: just as the roots of the knight's melancholy lie in the trauma of his wife's demise, so does the narrator locate the origin of his condition in a distant past: "I holde hit be a sicknesse / That I have suffred this eight yeer; / And yet my boote is never the ner" (36-38). Both subjects are constituted by their disturbing past; both are case histories, narratives of what is lost.

Further, both dreamer and Man in Black are implicated in experiences of textuality, so that reading and writing (and as the poem develops, these activities get more and more blurred) become intricate techniques of constructing identity. The narrator emerges out of an act of reading – an act at once explicit, when he requests that a book of romance (which contains the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone) be brought to him and reads it, and implicit, in the sense that the opening lines of the *Book of the Duchess* create an effect of unmistakable *déjà lu* – something both the poet and his reader will have come across in Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours* or elsewhere. Yet neither text (Ovid and Froissart) lingers in the category of the "passively consumed," but soon grows into acts of writing: the Ovidian story is re-told for the reader by the narrator (who apparently does not rely on an off-chance that his audience will be familiar with the *Ovide moralisé*) while the Froissart poem takes an almost physical shape in the figure of the black knight. Likewise, the Man in Black, as we learn from his piteous narrative, began his career as a reader through the process of courtly education ("I was able to have lerned tho, / And to have kend as wel or better, / Paraunter, other art or letre" [786-88]), but by the time of his meeting with the dreamer he is already a producer, not consumer, of courtly poetry. He is put on display before our eyes when he is about to perform "a lay, a manere song" (471); and he recites the first poem he wrote for his beloved (1175-80).

More importantly, the identity of the one arises in the process of textualizing the self of the other: the dreamer consolidates his selfhood by incorporating the Man in Black into his text while the black knight articulates his identity via the French tradition of courtly poetry, which of course constitutes the narrator's primary source for his dream vision (cf. Burger 335-41). In other words, the black knight attains a stable identity through inclusion into the narrator's poem, which is perhaps one of the main reasons why he finally agrees to disclose his sorrow to a stranger; whereas the dreamer depends on the rhetoric that the melancholic lover wields in order to finish the tale. With his white face and black garments, the knight is a written page (in a self-exposing gesture, he compares himself to "whit wal or table" [533] waiting to be written to come into existence, and the dreamer describes him as "treatable" [780]), most likely from one of the courtly texts whose scenes adorn the walls and windows of the room where the dreamer awakens into his dream.¹⁴ But the same could be argued about the dreamer, who is put in rhyme by the waking narrator.

Such a close connection between them is hardly surprising, considering that to a large extent the dreamer and the knight represent two aspects of the same personality, both being dream projections of the narrator's melancholic psyche.¹⁵ It does not obliterate the fact, however, that even as subjects of one another's discourse, as speaking positions constructed by the same discourse of French courtliness, the two principal voices of the poem never fully collapse into each other, remaining poised between extreme likeness and inveterate incompatibility. The latter is nowhere more evident than in the communicative failures that accompany the exchange between the dreamer and the Man in Black. Although at the beginning of their meeting the narrator distinctly overhears (and records) the Man in Black exclaim, "Now that I see my lady bright, / Which I have loved with al my might, / Is frome ded and ys agoon" (477-79), it is not until the very last lines of the poem (nearly nine hundred line later) that he appears to finally get the message. The lovelorn knight's intricate allegory of a game at

¹⁴ Nancy Ciccone argues that these texts represent "a structural analogue to the main scene in the *Book of the Duchess*, providing commentary on the man in black's autobiography and a cultural perspective on the death of White" (206).

¹⁵ A number of critics make this point from different positions: biographical (Condren 22), hermeneutic (Ferster 74, 81), feminist (Hansen 74-86, esp. 82), and formalist (Kiser 16; 154-55 n. 6).

chess with Fortune in which the knight loses his “fers” (617-709) is entirely lost on the dreamer. Granted, Chaucer-disguised-as-narrator may well be feigning dull-wittedness here in order to expose the rhetorical ostentation and superfluity of French courtly tradition, but then how do we explain the fact that his own discourse – discourse presumably free of those courtly excesses, inherently English, sincere, even “blunt” (I. Robinson 17) – is not without fault? The knight rebukes him three times (743, 1137, 1305), “Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest,” highlighting cracks within the speech of his apparently more skillful and original interlocutor. Lacking control over what he says, the dreamer is not so far removed from the abstruse language the knight utilizes to express his desire and grief. Indeed, as Edward Roberts points out, “the adequacy of discourse remains at issue throughout the poem” (84), with verbal shortcomings plaguing both the Man in Black, the dreamer, and the narrator.

What we discover in the *Book of the Duchess*, then, is not a binary opposition between a bourgeois, loveless, ironic, original English poet and an aristocratic, conventional, Francophile lover struggling with each other for dominance over the text of the poem. Rather than writing a split within the poetic self, I suggest, Chaucer’s poem undertakes a radical splintering of subjectivity (narrator becomes Alcyone becomes dreamer who becomes black knight who becomes his dead beloved etc.). Each self in the *Book of the Duchess* is in constant dialogue with a constellation other subjectivities (which often turn out to be projections of that same self);¹⁶ as a result, distinction between self/other becomes extremely difficult to maintain. Any self in the text is irrevocably ruptured: the “I” of the poem is simultaneously waking and dreaming, desiring and writing, aristocratic and middle-class, masculine and feminine, English and French. This splintering of identity, I contend, as well as the poem’s preoccupation with delineating a viable space for vernacular courtly writing, is closely associated with the discourse of melancholy that percolates through the text. As I have already pointed out, this malady, albeit probably in different forms, afflicts the two masculine subjects at the heart of

¹⁶ Cf.: “The dream itself ... initiates a response to the dangers of solipsism and pure subjectivism ... Within the dialogue, each character becomes the object that invades and disrupts the other’s subjectivity and leads to the final healing” (Lynch 46). I differ from Lynch, however, in that I do not believe that the poem reaches a point of consolation; on the contrary, this splintering of subjectivity remains the text’s primary feature until the end.

the poem – the narrator and the Man in Black. My view, however, is that melancholy operates on a much broader scope in the *Book of the Duchess*; the workings of melancholy not only underpin the destabilized Chaucerian subject, but help account for the poet's uneasy relationship with the tradition of French courtly writing.

To posit melancholy as a mechanism that orchestrates the dynamic of poetic selfhood in the poem, however, is to deal with several important theoretical questions about melancholy: is there a common ground between the narrator's and the black knight's versions of the malady? how is love-sickness related to melancholy? can we find a certain continuum between pre-modern ideas about melancholy on the one hand, and contemporary, first of all psychoanalytic, treatments of the subject on the other? These are the questions that I address in the following section. I focus primarily on early modern material for two reasons: First, in many ways, Renaissance theories of melancholy were compendiums of medieval knowledge, and those texts that were founded upon early modern developments in philosophy and science still persisted in incorporating earlier accounts of melancholy. As Stanley W. Jackson writes, “[t]he transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, however one conceives of it, and whatever dates one assigns to it, did not bring any significant change in how melancholia was described, explained, or treated” (78-79). Second, I am interested in the discursive impact of the Chaucerian poetics of melancholy on early modern England, hence my emphasis on how melancholy subjectivity was imagined in the world of Surrey and Sidney, and how these views can be applied to Chaucer's poem.

Towards a Poetics of Melancholy

As we have seen, there is no critical consensus about the nature of melancholy that troubles the narrator and the black knight: their conditions may well be different, although both imagine their sufferings to have been shaped by a past trauma. Against critics who seek to divorce the narrator and the black knight on the basis of the exact medical form their torment assumes, however, one could

argue that in the medieval and early modern periods the relationships between melancholy and lovesickness were governed by both similarity and contiguity. Not only did both maladies produce virtually identical symptoms, but in pre-modern medical taxonomy melancholy and lovesickness also eventually came to occupy differently inflected positions within the same class of disorders that required similar treatments. While it is true that initially in antiquity melancholy *per se* and lovesickness (the latter was also known as *amor hereos* and amorous melancholy) constituted two different traditions, already in the classical medical discourse of Hippocrates and Galen melancholy and lovesickness began to be discussed in similar terms. As Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella argue, there is “little doubt about the general association of the diseases raised by black bile [i.e. of melancholic nature] with the perturbations caused by inordinate passion” in antiquity (41). A foundation for theorizing the two in analogous terms was laid by pseudo-Aristotle’s *Problems*, which opens its discussion of the melancholic temperament with a famous question that connects black bile, nobility, and creativity: “Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to an such extent that they are affected by the diseases arising from the black bile?”(2:155). Soon, however, pseudo-Aristotle introduces an amorous dimension. Comparing the effects of black bile with those of wine, he notes, “wine makes men inclined to love, and Dionysus and Aphrodite are rightly associated with each other; and the melancholic are usually lustful” (2:159). Creative atrabilious melancholy is thus tied to erotic desire in one of the earliest texts on the subject.

Still, it was not until the arrival in the medieval West of the Arabic medical writings by al-Rāsi (Rhazes), ‘Ali ibn al-‘Abbās (Haly Abbas), and ‘Abdullāh Ali Sinā (Avicenna), largely based on Aristotle and Galen, that a close connection between melancholy and lovesickness was firmly established. The cornerstone text which revolutionized European thinking about these two afflictions and fused erotic longing and melancholic symptomatology into one form of disorder was Constantine of Africa’s *Viaticum* (c. 1065), a translation of Ibn al-Jazzār’s *Zād al-musāfir* with inclusions from other Arabic sources. This book, as well as the commentaries it solicited among Europe’s educated elites

(by Gerard of Berry, Giles of Santarem, and Peter of Spain), sealed the ties between melancholy and lovesickness (Wack 31-108; Heffernan 13-21; Beecher and Ciavolella 62-70; Dawson 14-15). Little changed for the early modern theorists of melancholy and manic desire; as Marion A. Wells writes, “[b]y the time we reach the early modern period, the connection between lovesickness and melancholy becomes inescapable” (35).

In order to understand the logic behind this alignment we need to look at the Galenic humoral theory of melancholy. The main cause of melancholy was an excessive presence in the human body of one of the four primary humours, *melancholy*, also known as black bile (*melaina chole*), a cold, dry, black, and sluggish substance associated with earth.¹⁷ Black bile was a natural element in the body, and bodies where it was predominant were diagnosed as having a melancholic complexion. The amount of black bile could increase through inordinate diet or unsuitable lifestyle and lead to serious, even debilitating consequences, from insomnia, fear and sadness to digestive and psychological disorders. As Thomas Walkington in *The optick glasse of humors* (1607) admits, “Of al the 4. this humour is the most unfortunate and greatest enemy to life, because its qualities being cold and drie do most of al disagree from the liuely qualities” (65^l). Such a disposition would be diagnosed as *natural* melancholy, but an excess of black bile could likewise be produced *unnaturally*, by burning or heating of any of the four humours. The product of such burning was referred to as unnatural melancholy, or melancholy adust, a condition deemed to be even more pernicious than natural melancholy. “Melancholy or blacke choler is deuyded in to two kyndes,” says Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Castel of Helthe* (1541), “[n]aturall, whyche is the dregges of pure bloud, and is knowen by the blacknes ... and is verily colde and drye. Unnaturalle, whyche procedeth of the adustion of choleric mixture, and is hotter and lighter, hauyng in it violence to kyll, with a dangerous disposition.” The latter occurs “in foure kyndes, eyther it is of naturall melancholy aduste, or of the more pure part of the bloudde aduste, or of choler adust, or of salt fleume [phlegm] adust” (11^v, 72^v). As Timothie Bright writes in his *Treatise*

¹⁷ The other humours include blood, phlegm, and choler (yellow bile), associated with air, water, and fire respectively. On the Galenic theory of humours, see Babb 21-72; Paster; Siraisi 78-114; Temkin.

of *Melancholie* (1586), “besides the complexion inclining to such temper, this matter [black bile] is increased by perturbation of mind, by temper of aire, and kind of habitation, and that humour which otherwise would yeeld a nutritiue iuyce ... by this occasion is turned into these dregges of melancholie” (25).

It is through this possibility of an unnaturally melancholic body that lovesickness was categorized as a sub-species of melancholy. Inordinate or unrequited love contributed, through its excessive heat, to an increase of the amount of melancholy humour in the lover’s body. In the words of Jacques Ferrand from *Erotomania* (1610, English trans. 1640), through violent perturbations in the lover’s mind, “the blood becomes adust, earthy, and Melancholy, as in all other violent passions, except joy, according to Galen, by which meanes diverse have fallen into strange and desperate diseases; growing Melancholy, Foolish, Mad, Cynicall, Wolvish” (10). Although in its early stages love is not a melancholic disease, prolonged unrequited desire produces results identical to other forms of atrabilious disturbance, unnatural melancholy easily slipping into its natural form (see Babb 134; Beecher). Marsilio Ficino, one of the principal Renaissance authorities on melancholy, in his *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love* even imagines erotic melancholy almost as a form of natural complexion:

the entire attention of the lover’s soul is devoted to continuous thought about the beloved ... For this reason the food in the stomach is not digested properly ... For this reason, only a little rude blood is dispersed from there through the veins ... [W]hen pure and clear blood is dissipated, there remains only the impure, thick, dry, and black. Hence the body dries out and grows squalid, and hence lovers become melancholics. (121)

Not surprisingly, Andreas Laurentius in his *Discourse ... of Melancholike Diseases* (1599) prescribes the same course of dietary treatment to all melancholics, including lovers: “then must wee handle these amorous persons in such maner, and after the same order which I haue appointed for the melancholike..., and almost with the very same remedies,” which include purgation, medication, and dietary correction (124).

Indeed, to distinguish, terminologically and etiologically, between different kinds of melancholy is somewhat to go against the pre-modern trend itself. Notwithstanding, some recent studies of early modern melancholy attempt to draw sharp divisionary lines between lovesickness and natural melancholy. Adam Kitzes's *Politics of Melancholy* seeks to contrast melancholy as a medical and social problem to the "genial" and "erotic" melancholy of Aristotle and Ficino; whereas Douglas Trevor's *Poetics of Melancholy* argues that "scholarly melancholy", which he takes to be dispositional, "represents a break from the objectal, episodic understanding of sadness that we see in earlier, Renaissance treatments of love melancholy" (14). These studies undoubtedly teach us a lot about the specific types of melancholy that they choose as their focus, but such compartmentalization ignores the fact that in pre-modern theories of melancholy erotic passion, political acumen, creativity, and atrabilious sadness are imagined as a cluster of related medical, social, and cultural issues. From Aristotle to Burton, no sharp divisionary lines are drawn between various kinds of melancholic disturbances. On the contrary, the very essence of melancholy is its variability and instability. To give final word to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621 first ed.),

What Physitians say of distinct Species in their bookes, it much matters not, since that in their Patients bodies they are commonly mixt. In such obscurity therefore, variety and confused mixture, of Symptoms, causes: how difficult a thing is it to treat of several kindes apart; to make any certainty or distinction among so many casualties, distractions, when seldome two men shall be like effected *per omnia*? (1:171)

Melancholy takes a variety of forms; to seek to sever ties between lovesickness and other forms of natural and unnatural melancholy is then to depart from the tenets of pre-modern medical thought.

Another issue to address is the methodological and historical compatibility of the pre-modern discourse of melancholy and the modern discourse of psychoanalysis. When Freud uses the term "melancholia" to explain, as we shall soon see, the structure of the ego, or when Julia Kristeva writes about her observations of depression and melancholia in clinical patients, it is obvious that they mean not quite the same thing as Gerard of Berry does when he classifies *amor hereos* as "a melancholic

worry” (qtd. in Wack 199), or when Burton spends three volumes anatomizing the disease bearing the same name. Still, we must not overlook a certain genealogical continuity that allows these diverse iterations of the same term to preserve its analytical core within different cultural contexts and systems of knowledge.¹⁸ Indeed, a significant number of early modern literary studies have recently employed Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis – often alongside historical interpretations of melancholy,¹⁹ – which indicates that medieval and modern melancholy share something more than just a tag. As I shall demonstrate, notwithstanding the differences in analytical vocabulary and epistemological rifts separating pre-modern and modern theories of melancholy, the questions they grapple with remain unchanged through the centuries.

Psychoanalysis, in many instances, not so much offers an explanatory mechanism that radically departs from pre-modern theory as it crystallizes the insights of pre-modern writers, casting them in a language more accessible to the modern reader. That is, I argue that pre-modern and modern (Freudian) approaches to melancholy, rather than to be contrasted, need to be construed as parts of a single textual history. Reading melancholy thus entails working through thickly layered structures of text and meaning and being sensitive to the memory of medical, philosophical, and literary discourses that preserve traces of its earlier notions in subsequent utterances. Consequently, I approach both the pre-modern understanding of melancholy and the Freudian (as well as post-Freudian) psychoanalysis as textual fictions that may have lost much of their clinical validity but remain a powerful cultural code that facilitates an understanding of other textual fictions, such as Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, Surrey’s *Songes and Sonettes*, and Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. Neither pre-modern medical treatises nor early modern poetry nor Freud’s writings refer to the extra-textual reality of melancholy. They gesture, instead, to an imaginative textual construction that engages, often across large spans of time, with fictional narratives rather than with medical facts. In place of a dichotomy of

¹⁸ This continuity has been addressed in studies as diverse as Stanley W. Jackson’s history of medicine; Juliana Schiesari’s investigation of systemic misogyny in the writings on melancholy from Aristotle to Kristeva; and Giorgio Agamben’s philosophical investigation of the phantasmatic character of desire in Western culture in *Stanzas* (esp. 3-28).

¹⁹ See Enterline, *Tears of Narcissus*; Kitzes; and, particularly, M.A. Wells.

past and present, of pre-modern literary discourse and of modern psychoanalytic theoretical discourse, I propose a triangulation of imaginative accounts of poetic melancholy, one that reads Freud, the pre-modern poets from Chaucer to Sidney, and medical writers like Bright and Burton as texts in equal shares involved in the production of discursive figurations of the disease. From this angle, my reading, despite its obvious debt to Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva, is not quite psychoanalytical in the sense that it does not privilege psychoanalysis as a critical metalanguage but broaches it as part of the discursive formation of melancholy that both shapes our understanding of the pre-modern poetics of melancholy and, from an historical perspective, is shaped by them.

One of the areas where the pre-modern and the modern come uncannily close to one another, and one which proves particularly illuminating for the literary texts I am discussing here, is the question of fragmented subjectivity. Gerard of Berry describes lovesickness, arising “because the entire attention and thought, aided by desire, is fixed on the beauty of some form or figure,” as an imbalance among the estimative, imaginative, and concupiscible faculties of the mind “misled by sensed intentions into apprehending non-sensed accidents” (qtd. in Wack 199), a disturbance that privileges an object and disrupts “the mutually dependent processes of imagination and estimation,” which in turn “draws attention to the fundamental ontological instability of the subject” (M. A. Wells 43-44). Several centuries later Laurentius, similarly, finds the debilitating effects of melancholy in the patient’s obsession with an object, although he leaves the nature of objectal fixation deliberately obscure: “Melancholie therefore is a dotage, not coupled with an ague, but with feare and sadness. We call that dotage, when some one of the principall faculties of the mind, as imagination or reason is corrupted” (87). Erotic melancholy offers a more palpable version of this scenario: the lover “doteth continually vpon this object, runneth after his shadow, and is neuer at rest. There are now some certaine yeares past, since I saw a gentleman ouertaken with this kinde of melancholie, he talked being alone vnto his shadow, he called it, welcomed it, kissed it, ranne after it euery day...” (121). Marsilio Ficino likewise imagines the work of desire as an invasion of the self by an object of love, which the subject is unable to expunge: “Love is a voluntary death ... For after I have lost myself, if I recover myself

through you, I have myself through you; if I have myself through you, I have you before and more than I have myself, and I am closer to you than myself, since I approach myself in no other way than through you as an intermediary” (55-56). On a more somber note, Bright notes that melancholics are subjected to the feelings of guilt and shame, “though they haue committed nothing deseruing rebuke, or worthy of shame” (171), their ego turning against itself. Alterity within one’s own identity and self-disdain seem to be marks of a melancholic mind.

Turning to psychoanalysis, we discover that the split within one’s self that pre-modern writers only hint at receives a full articulation in Freud’s essay on the subject. Defining the mechanism of melancholy in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud connects it with the loss of an external object. As a result,

the free libido [resulting from the loss] was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. (249)

The tension between subject and object is introjected into the subject, which results in the splitting of the ego into two agencies which perform the roles of censorious subject and pliable object under scrutiny within the limits of the same “I.” The melancholic ego (unlike its counterpart in mourning) is emptied of its worth, denigrated and despised by the subject himself; in this, Freud argues, “[w]e see how in him one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object” (247). The melancholic self is thus essentially split between subject and object within itself.

Indeed the most palpable instance of melancholic ego-splitting in the *Book of the Duchess* is the severance of the narrator's psyche into dreamer and black knight, particularly if we grant metapoetic problematics the key role in their relationship. Within the melancholic narrator's ego, the critical poetic agency becomes detached from that segment of his ego which identifies with an object (in this case, French courtly culture), and the outcome of this bisection is a psychic dialogue between two aspects of his self, with the dreamer placing the Man in Black in an object-position and critiquing what he represents. It is therefore not surprising that Freud's mechanism of melancholy powerfully resonates with Chaucer's text, since there is little Freud could teach Chaucer or his medieval and early modern readers which they did not already know. Chaucerian melancholy, however, seems to exceed the original Freudian schema: after the initial rift in the poetic "I" each sliver of the ego in turn becomes further divided. The dreamer takes on new identities (e.g. that of a noble hunter²⁰) while the black knight, too, empties his self and displaces it with the feminine ego of his deceased wife White, enacting her pallid complexion, deadness, and even gender (cf. Hendershot 12-13). When the dreamer first encounters the Man in Black, the description he provides is one of an unmistakably melancholic subject whose ego is ruptured. The knight makes "a compleynte to hymselfe," and later the dreamer mentions that the Man in Black "spak noght / But argued with his owne thought" (464, 503-04). When the knight finally answers, the dreamer registers another facet of this unstable ego, "Loo, how goodly spak thys knight, / As hit had be another wyght" (529-30). And although the dreamer attempts to heal these fissures in his interlocutor ("For, by my trouthe, to make yow hool / I wol do al my ower hool" [553-54], punning on "healthy"/"whole"), in the end the knight returns to his white

²⁰ From the twelfth century onward melancholy became associated with aristocracy and grew into "another mark of precedence, like wealth and leisure themselves" (Wack 61; see also Beecher and Ciavolella 75-76; M. A. Wells 22-30). Medieval etymology confused *eros*, *heros* (hero), and *herus* (lord), and thus buttressed the association of *amor hereos* with the cut of chivalry and nobility. As Arnald of Villanova claims in *Tractaus de amore heroico*, "it is called heroical as if to say lordly, not only because it befalls the lords, but also because it rules by subjugating the soul and by ruling over the hearts of men, or because the acts of such lovers towards the objects of their desires are similar to the acts of the subjects towards their masters" (qtd. in Beecher and Ciavolella 387). Thus, we should not exclude a possibility that the dreamer's apparent elevation of his social status in the dream and participation in the royal hunt, on horseback, is a by-product of his melancholy.

castle, still suffering from a ruptured ego. The same is true for the narrator, however, whose dream-self resists final integration and remains at odds with the writing agency of the poem.

Both pre-modern and modern theories of melancholy, however, also register further dissolution of identity, beyond the original rupture of the psyche into the ego and its critic. In his later work, *The Ego and the Id*, Freud not only posits the melancholic split within the self between the subject and the internalized object as central to the production of the ego through object-identification, or what he calls “the transformation of an erotic object-choice into an alteration of the ego” (28), but speculates that this identification is not a singular occurrence but a continuous process that in extreme cases renders the self fundamentally unstable:

If [object identifications] obtain the upper hand and become too numerous, unduly powerful and incompatible with one another, a pathological outcome will not be far off. It may come to a disruption of the ego in consequence of the different identifications... Even when things do not go as far as this, there remains the question of conflicts between the various identifications into which the ego comes apart, conflicts which cannot after all be described as entirely pathological. (30-31)

Every self is intrinsically melancholic, and every self is a constant process of identification.²¹

We read similar things in early modern theories of melancholy – “a disease of the imagination” (Beecher and Ciavolella 151). It is a stock remark among pre-modern writers that melancholic persons are haunted by various fantasies and imaginations. For Ficino the black bile of melancholy “fills the head [of the lover] with its vapours, dries out the brain, and ceaselessly troubles the soul day and night with hideous and horrible images” (121). According to Levinus Lemnius’ *Touchstone of Complexion* (1576), “the Melancholike iuyce disperseth it selfe into euey part of the body, makinge the skinne to be of sootie and dunne colour: and further disquieteth mynde, with sundry stroung apparitions, and phantasticall imaginations” (138^v). If we read on, however, “imagination” emerges as

²¹ On the significance of the mechanism of (melancholic) identification for the formation and existence of the ego in Freudian theory, see Borch-Jakobsen esp. 10-52.

early modern equivalent for Freudian “identification.” As Laurentius captures the proleptically psychoanalytic mechanism of melancholic mimesis, “[th]is disquieting and distracting of themselves, ariseth out of the diuersitie of matters which they propound and set before themselves, for receiuing all manner of formes” (94). Melancholics imagine themselves to be someone, or something else, for any impression in a melancholic “suffereth not it selue easily to be blotted out ... Such as are of an extreme drie temperature, and haue the braine also very drie; if they happen to commonly to looke vpon some pitcher or glasse (which are things very vsuall and common) they will judge themselves to be pitchers or glasses” (Laurentius 97). Walkington in *The optick glasse* claims that melancholic minds “are so out of frame and distraught, that they are in bondage to many ridiculous passions, imagining that they see and feele such things, as no man els can either perceiue or touch” (69^{r-v}). Not only see and feel, but they *are* such things, we might add, for Walkington goes on to relate a series of anecdotes about melancholic “imaginationes:”

There was one possest with this humour, that tooke a strong conceit, that he was changed into an earthen vessel, who earnestly intreated his friends in any case not to come near him, lest ... he might be shakt or crusht to pieces ... There was one so Melancholicke that hee confidently did affirme, his whole body was made of butter, wherefore hee neuer durst come neere any fire, least the heate should haue melted him. (69^v-70^r)

Other texts from the early modern age likewise parade in front of their readers galleries of psychotic identifications. Burton, citing his numerous predecessors, stresses this propensity among melancholics to imagine themselves a wild array of things and persons:

some are turned to Wolves, from men to Women and Women againe to Men to the same Imagination: or from Men to Asses, Dogges, or any other shapes ... that melancholy men ... conceive so many phantasticall visions, apparitions to themselves, and have such absurd apparitions, as that they are Kings, Lords, Cocks, Beares, Apes, Owls; that they are heavy, light, transparent, great, and little, senseless and dead ...

can be imputed to nothing else, but to a corrupt, false, and violent Imagination.

(1:252)

The protean subject of the *Book of the Duchess* embodies this logic of melancholic identification: denigrating his existent self, he creates a series of substitute egos and pluralizes his identity across a range of subjects, each of those identities, in turn, undergoing further splintering, with the overall effect being that of a merry-go-round of identifications. As Troilus, the exemplary Chaucerian melancholic, captures this scenario of subjectivity, “Thow koudest nevere in love thiselven wisse” (I.622).

Dissolution of the self is inextricably interwoven with another symptom of melancholy, namely, the subject’s troubled relation to language. As Julia Kristeva writes in the *Black Sun*, melancholy is a disavowal of the archaic separation from the mother, an unfulfilled mourning for the original Thing, and thus a rejection of meaningful language (of the father) that constitutes the subject. In a state of melancholy, language

seems secondary, frozen, somewhat removed from the head and body of the person who is speaking. Or else it is from the very beginning evasive, uncertain, deficient, quasi mutistic: “one” speaks to you already convinced that the words are wrong and therefore “one” speaks carelessly, “one” speaks without believing in it ... [T]he speech of the depressed is to them like an alien skin; melancholy persons are foreigners in their maternal tongue. They have lost the meaning – the value – of their mother tongue for want of losing their mother. (43, 53)

For Kristeva this collapse of language is triggered by “a denial of negation,” i.e. by a rejection of the paternal signifier (an act predicated upon a negation of loss of the originary, maternal Thing by entrance into language) and a nostalgic longing for the plenitude of the Real (43-47). Language is forgotten for the sake of an imaginary re-uniting with the lost Mother.

Though it is vital for Kristeva’s take on melancholy, and it does represent a productive approach to reading the *Book of the Duchess* (see, for example, Margherita), I would like to steer my discussion away from the familial dynamics of psychoanalysis. Pre-modern experts do not link mel-

anxious asymbolia to familial attachments, yet their conclusions are strikingly similar. Elyot diagnoses melancholics with “sodayn inconsistencie of the tongue” (73^r) while for Lemnius, “the grimme and surlye Planet of *Saturne*, together with Melancholie so disposeth them, and (as though they were bound by vow to silence and taciturnity) a man shall scantly get a word out of their mouths” (146^v). According to Laurentius, “if he would call any to help him, his speech is cut before it be halfe ended, and what he speaketh commeth out in falsing and stammering form” (82). Bright describes melancholic patients as “of pace slow, silent, negligent ... Neither is the speech interrupted, and broken only by the disorderly expiration, but the inspiration being by sobs cutteth also the voice, & marreth the distinct pronuntiation” (124, 156).

Indeed both the dreamer and the knight confess to a detachment from the symbolic. Introducing himself as a melancholic, the dreamer admits he cannot differentiate between “nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth / Ne me nys nothing leef nor looth;” everything is the same to him, “Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be” (7-8, 10). Aside from emotional numbness and indistinction which constitutes an ethical problem (cf. Rosenfeld 97-98), these lines also suggest an elision of the category of *difference* that sustains all linguistic signification. Under the impact of melancholy, the capacity of language to signify has been diminished, making both discourse and subjectivity problematic. What once appeared natural, that words have meaning, has now been exposed as a masqueraded arbitrary construction. It is not surprising that the narrator describes his existence as “agaynes kynde [i.e. nature]” (16). Similarly, difference is all but dissolved for the Man in Black. Describing his melancholic state, he falls on a series of clichés from the textbook of amorous poetry from the troubadours to Petrarch:

My song ys turned to pleynynge,
 And al my laughtre to wepynge,
 My glade thoghtes to hevynesse;
 In travayle ys myn ydelnesse
 And eke my reste; my wele is woo,
 My goode ys harm, and evermoo

In wrathe ys turned my pleynge,
And my delyt into sorwyng.
Myn hele ys turned into seknesse,
In drede ys al my sykernesse;
To derke ys turned al my lyght,
My wyt ys foly, my day is nyght,
My love ys hate, my sleep wakyng,
My myrthe and meles is fastyng,
My countenaunce ys nycete
And al abaved, wherso I be;
My pees, in pledyng and in werre. (598-615)

Although it is easy to dismiss this passage as a piece of overabused courtly language, with the lover trapped between the oppositions of dark/light, love/hate, peace/war, delight/sorrow etc., what these lines enact is the process of binarism slipping away: it is not that the lover swings between the extremes, but rather that his laughter has dissolved into weeping and vice versa. The two states are no longer governed by difference, and therefore neither laughter nor weeping can signify. Like Kristeva's melancholic persons, both the narrator and the Man in Black are aliens in language; it is a foreign domain that no longer conveys meaning.

But love, language, and selfhood, the principal objects of loss that account for the poem's melancholy subject, together constitute the discourse of French courtliness whose ambivalent status in the *Book of the Duchess* is also governed by the logic of melancholy. Chaucer's poem is strangely Francophobiac and Francophilic at once. If Chaucer, as many critics insist, broadcasts the inadequacy of French courtly language throughout the poem, why does his melancholic alienation from the vocabulary and grammar of *dit amoureux* not lead him to rejecting them altogether? Indeed, in the *Book of the Duchess* images, characters, rhetorical figures, and other conventions of French tradition are exposed as hollow, aimless, even unintelligible, and yet they continue to provide Chaucer with the

only system of poetic signification, whatever its limitations. As Deanne Williams astutely remarks, “the *Book of the Duchess* records a nostalgia for this previous unity [of French culture] even as it enacts its breakdown” (*French Fetish* 31; see also S. Davis).²² One of the answers to this paradox is the poetics of melancholy, a type of writing that disavows its own discursive history but remains inextricably bound to it. For according to the logic of melancholy, a rejected identification is never discarded completely; its residue forever remains part of the self. Freud describes a melancholic ego as “a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes ... [that] contains the history of those object choices” (*Ego* 29). This is echoed in Kristeva’s argument that for the melancholic subject linguistic signs are “disowned, weakened, ambiguous, devalorized, but nevertheless persistent until asymbolia shows up ... depressed persons do not forget how to use signs. They keep them, but the signs seem absurd, delayed, ready to be extinguished” (*Black Sun* 47). Accordingly, melancholic writing never comes down to a total displacement of discourse or identity: what appears discarded becomes disavowed history which, even if repressed, returns and continues to determine the new discursive and subjective formations erected out of the debris of melancholic devastation. Seeking, in the face of an impending complete erasure of the self as he drifts away from language, to continue as a speaking subject, a melancholic poet creates an utterance out of the ruins of language, integrating, in subversively unexpected ways, the failed, inadequate signs into this poetic performance.

My formulations suggests that the Chaucerian poetics of melancholy places the subject in a unique artistic position, although I do not refer to the creative potential associated with melancholy in pre-modern theory from Aristotle and Plato to Ficino.²³ Faced with signs that are no longer bound by the naturalizing powers of the system of writing, with poetic vocabulary and grammar that, upon be-

²² It is hardly accidental that several – non-psychoanalytic – critics have described Chaucer’s role in the poem as a *bricoleur* – a poet “finding his materials as if by chance, piecing them together in astonishing new ways, moving always slightly outside the bounds of accepted roles and established myths” (Nolan 206; also Palmer).

²³ See the classical study by Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 241-74. Curiously, the notion of genial melancholy is revalorized by Kristeva, as “manic activity” of a melancholic writer, “rising by means of ideal and artifice above ordinary constructions suitable to the standards of natural language and trivialized social code” (*Black Sun* 50). See Schiesari, *Gendering* (77-93), for a critique of Kristeva’s theory as complicit in the patriarchal discourse of genial melancholy.

ing translated from French into English, have departed from their enunciatory context (it is worth recalling that Chaucer's narrator lives – and writes – “agaynes kynde;” and that he wonders, apropos the black knight, how Nature “Myght suffre any creature / To have such sorwe, and be not ded”), the subject nonetheless discovers that preserving this inadequate system of signs offers the only path to sustaining any kind of legible poetic identity. Engendered in this act of melancholy poetics is a subject who will forever oscillate between the alien, false, rejected language and the new language of melancholy, between the lost self and the new self. This poetry of melancholy always includes its own irretrievable history, its own dispersal between the past and the present. The French sources cannot be superseded by an unadulterated English utterance – rather, exposed as failed by the melancholy subject, the former are re-integrated into the new language of English courtliness and thus constitute a (disowned) part of its history. Melancholic discourse at once moves forward and looks back, just as the black knight at the end of Chaucer's poem, presumably consoled and cured by a conversation with the dreamer, returns to his “long castel with walles white” (1318); and the narrator (together with the reader) is catapulted, at the end of the poem, back to the beginning. Similarly, though the melancholic Chaucerian subject appears to reject French courtly subjectivity in the *Book of the Duchess*, he re-appropriates it for a new performance of the self. This new poetic “I” constructed out of dysfunctional language still contains traces of the old selfhood, however, which results in a splintered, melancholic Chaucerian subjectivity and announces a melancholic form of writing that simultaneously reiterates and subverts its own past. The operations of this type of writing in early modern Petrarchism, in Surrey and Sidney, are my object of study in the remainder of this chapter.

“Swete is his death, that takes his end by love:” Petrarchan Melancholy in

Surrey's ‘Songes and Sonettes’

If indeed, as I tend to think, Sidney in his *Apology* expresses his admiration for the Surrey of Richard Tottel's 1557 *Songes and Sonettes* rather than the Surrey of manuscript transmission, the po-

etic voice that the collection presents deserves closer attention. While earlier studies, though admitting the book's significance, conceptualized the Tottel volume as a chaotic sampling of English verse from the period before the 1550s,²⁴ the recent edition of the second (Elizabethan) version of *Songes and Sonettes* by Paul A. Marquis has alerted readers to the early modern editor's attention to minute details in the arrangements of the poems, both within individual sections and the volume as a whole.²⁵ In fact, I would like to argue, Tottel's collection re-orders Surrey's disparate songs and sonnets into a coherent narrative of loss and desire with a unique poetic voice, into an important precursor of the sonnet sequences that were to flourish in the 1590s, including *Astrophil and Stella*. One of the most salient markers of this cyclic orientation of the text is the figure of the "lover" appearing in the titles supplied by Tottel (e.g. "The lover comforteth himselfe with the worthinesse of his love" [16]). The "lover" transcends the limits of individual poems, producing a certain autobiographical effect. The outcome of this reorientation is a new image of Surrey's poetic self: rather than a conventional, if urbane and adroit, Petrarchan versifier that Surrey appears to be in the eyes of the critics (most recently, Skura 39-41), in Tottel's *Miscellany* his is a knotty, disturbed subjectivity; at once Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan, his self is utterly unstable in a Chaucerian fashion.

A nod towards Chaucer is hardly accidental, for the medieval poet is a persistent presence in Surrey's verse. As William Sessions suggests (*Earl*), Surrey's poetry through and through develops out of an admixture of continental (both classical and early modern) and native (predominantly Chaucerian) legacies, which materializes particularly acutely in Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes*. The two opening poems in *Songes and Sonettes* ("The sunne hath twice brought furth his tender grene" [1] and "The soote season, that bud and blome forth brings" [2]) – while voicing Petrarchan sentiments – allude quite explicitly to trademark Chaucerian beginnings (the *General Prologue* and *Parliament of Fowls*), and at the close of the section, in his epitaph on Thomas Wyatt (W. resteth here" [35]), Surrey again invokes Chaucer as the exemplary – and dead – English poet of the past, enveloping the

²⁴ See, for example, Lewis 236-40; Peterson 39-86; Pomeroy 1-16, 31-52.

²⁵ All references to Surrey's poems will be to the poem and line numbers in *Richard Tottel's 'Songes and Sonettes': The Elizabethan Version*.

whole section in Chaucerian tradition. Surrey's canon also contains repeated references to Trojan history and thus to Chaucer's *Troilus*.²⁶ I want to suggest, however, that the Surrey section in the *Songes and Sonettes* is also Chaucerian in other, subtler ways: namely, it is what I defined as Chaucerian melancholy, with its splintered, destabilized self bordering on poetic asymbolia, that governs the construction of Surrey's poetic subjectivity and determines his relationship with the language of Petrarchism. One of the first English Petrarchans, Surrey is simultaneously one of the first English anti-Petrarchans, but also one of the preeminent Tudor Chaucerians, inasmuch as his anti-Petrarchan discourse re-activates a subject position already stamped on the vernacular by Chaucer's poetics of melancholy.

The term "anti-Petrarchism" requires a brief commentary. Resistance to Petrarch's formal and ideological strategies and deautomatization of Petrarchan writing emerge alongside the normative Petrarchan model, for Petrarch himself engages in a self-reflexive critique of his own erotic and textual desires, creating possibilities for later poets to reconfigure the model they find themselves faced with. Earlier critics described anti-Petrarchism as simply one of the conventions of Petrarchism, as repeated attacks on the poetic fashion which, nevertheless, "never seriously called in doubt the validity of the convention or its usefulness as a means of poetic expression" (Forster 57). More recent studies, however, have emphasized the instability of Petrarchan discourse, claiming that rewriting and subversion are inscribed in the mode itself. All poetry after Petrarch is post-Petrarchan, Roland Greene has suggested (*Post-Petrarchism*), in the sense that it revises, reinterprets, and reshapes its source; for "[t]here is nothing more quintessentially Petrarchan than an attempt to go beyond Petrarchism" (Dasenbrock 17). "If Petrarchism itself questions the conventions it establishes," remarks Barbara Estrin, it is not surprising that subsequent poets "inherit the unease at its core" (12). As

²⁶ For the importance of the Troy myth for Surrey, including his translations of two books of the *Aeneid*, see Crewe 48-78; Guy-Bray, "Embracing Troy;" Hiscock 53-58; Lines 11-16; Sessions, *Earl* 134-52. Seth Lerer's *Courtly Letters* discusses the general significance of Chaucer for Henrician self-fashioning, and his excellent section on Surrey and Tottel's elegiac Chaucerianism (201-07) shows how the Chaucerian sense of poetic loss is central to this Tudor collection (202-03). For Chaucer's own relationship with the Trojan myth of origin, see Patterson, *Subject* 84-164.

Christopher Warley has brilliantly shown, the very opposition of “conventional Petrarchism” and “original anti-Petrarchism” is a product of nineteenth-century social, national, and cultural sensibilities, an analytical apparatus largely alien to Renaissance poetry itself (*Sonnet Sequences* 19-44). Consequently, it is all but impossible to distinguish between Petrarchan imitation and anti-Petrarchan rejection, which is reflected in the vocabulary recently suggested for dealing with the ambiguities of Petrarchan writing, from “counter-Petrarchism” (Dubrow, *Echoes*) to “pseudo-Petrarchism” (Bell). Limitations of the term “anti-Petrarchism” notwithstanding, however, I retain it in this chapter and apply it to sustained and consistent attempts to dismantle the normative forms of Petrarchan writing in the poetry of Surrey and Sidney, attempts that not only involve a rigorous self-critique of the poetic subject, but threaten to sabotage the very foundations of identity that is charged with performing this critique. Granted, anti-Petrarchan tones are found in many English sonneteers, but few poets carry out their projects of questioning Petrarch’s legacy as determinedly and overtly – and as fearlessly – as do Sidney and Surrey. By establishing a homology between Tudor anti-Petrarchism and Chaucer’s anti-Francophile medieval poetics, moreover, I link the term to a certain ideology of nationhood that informs Surrey’s and Sidney’s fascination with demolishing the very poetic vehicle they choose to deploy in the first place.²⁷ Thus, in the context of the present argument the use of an otherwise somewhat awkward term appears justified.

Songes and Sonettes opens with what Tottel designates as a “Description of the restlesse state of a lover, with sute to his ladie, to rue on his diying hart” (1), a monologue of a lovesick Petrarchan lover:

The sunne hath twice brought furth his tender grene,
 Twice clad the earth in lively lustinesse:
 Ones have the windes the trees despoiled clene,
 And new again begins their cruelnesse,
 Since I have hid under my brest the harm

²⁷ On Petrarchism as a discourse of national identity in pre-modern Europe, see Kennedy, *Site*.

That never shall recover healthfulnesse. (1.1-6)

The secret wound of melancholy that he has long hidden under his breast remains forever fresh, and this wound is what determines the subject, making him – like Chaucer’s narrator and Man in Black – a case history, an unfinished temporality, and not just in this text but throughout Surrey’s section of Tottel’s miscellany.²⁸ Writing becomes an act of remembering, retrospection, self-historicizing.²⁹ The opening reference to the past trauma also points forward, though, towards a story to be told. But what story? The speaker’s confession, “And in my minde I measure pace by pace, / To seke the place where I my self had lost” (1.34-35), puts this self in question, renders it provisional, replaceable – in other words, melancholic, which suggests to the reader that what is to follow is a narrative of fractured identity in which the speaker seeks to recover his lost self. According to Ficino, this is the reason why melancholic lovers sigh so much: “They sigh because they are losing themselves, because they are destroying themselves, because they are ruining themselves” (52). Surrey’s lines also stress the temporal aspect of this scenario of melancholy: the loss is located in the past while the speech act that acknowledges it occurs in the present. This is a narrative where the speaker’s ego becomes the object of discourse, but in the ruthless world of melancholy this object is a *lost* one. Surrey’s lines anticipate the Freudian schema where object loss (unrequited love) becomes ego loss (“...the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego...” [Freud, “Mourning” 249]). Paradoxically, this move offers a path to averting loss as complete loss by way of possessing the unattainable object in memory. Surrey’s sequence thus announces itself as the work of unfinished mourning, as the process of simultaneously imagining the speaker’s self as lost, provoking a spate of melancholic substitute-identifications,

²⁸ The imagery of the love wound also occurs in poems 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, 19, 24, 26, 34, and 39.

²⁹ Sessions describes retrospection as “a major device of Surrey’s poetic art” (*Earl* 71), and Andrew Hiscock’s recent book likewise puts emphasis on Surrey’s “poetics of memory” within a larger context of early modern humanistic recovery, arguing that “Surrey’s very poetic oeuvre should be construed as a collective act of memorial construction” (Hiscock 62, see 37-64). Neither, however, connects Surrey’s poetry to the discourse of melancholy.

and restoring it to the subject in acts of remembrance. It is a trauma at once unavailable and constantly present: “Lo, if I seke, how I do find my sore: / And if I flee, I cary with me still / The venomd shaft” (1.46-48).

There is also another, darker, shade to this picture of self-loss, for fixation on the lost object (rather, self-as-object) brings with it a taste of death, with the speaker living a “[s]trange kinde of death, in life” (1.17). For what it is worth, the horizon of expectations thus created by the first poem not only firmly places its subject in the territory of melancholy and announces unfixdness of the self as its primary mechanism of narrative development, but tacitly introduces death of the subject as one of the themes that this sequence explores. Death and suicidal drives, however, are common symptoms of melancholy. Atrabilious disposition, Lemnius writes, is frequently “threatned with death and extreme dissolution” (135^v); and according to Laurentius, melancholics “conceiue of death, as a terrible thing, and notwithstanding (which is strange) they often desire it, yea so eagerlie, as that they will not let to destroy themselues” (92). Those words are echoed by Bright’s *Treatise of Melancholie*, where he remarks about those suffering from adust melancholy, “when desperate furie is ioyned with feare: which so terrifieth, that to auoide the terrour, they attempt sometimes to depriue themselues of life: so irksome it is vnto them through these tragicall conceits” (111). Lovers are not excluded: as Burton claims, “[i]t is so well knowne in every village, how many have either died for love or made away themselves” (3:199). The loss of the object is poised to translate into the death of the subject.³⁰

Before the poem ends, however, the lover is revealed to be a poet (“...I may plaine my fill / Unto my self unlesse this carefull song / Print in your hart some parcel of my tene” [1.49-51]), and so the identity the speaker claims to have lost turns out to be a Petrarchan self. Yet he is a poet whose speech is severely affected by his melancholic disposition: “For I, alas, in silence all to long, / Of mine old hurt yet fele the wound but grene” (1.52-53). The injury inflicted by lovesickness has

³⁰ Though he does not discuss Tottel’s *Miscellany*, Crewe’s remarks that Surrey’s poetry narrates “a story ... of suicide, in which a “poetics of suicide” is elaborated, and it is therefore irreducibly a story of willfully embraced failure or defeat” (51, see 48-78) are extremely apposite to my argument, although Crewe does not link, as I do, Surrey’s suicidal poetics to his Petrarchan experiments.

drained language of its communicative potential, has detached the lover from speech, paralyzing his utterance and making him inarticulate. As in the *Book of the Duchess*, however, this melancholic silence is not confined to the subject of the poem, but powerfully spills into its form. What lovesickness does to the speaker, Surrey does to his own text: amid the clichéd Petrarchan figures of fire and ice (“What warmth (alas) may serve for to disarm / The frosen hart, that mine in flame hath made” [1.9-10]) and solitary nautical passage (“For if I found sometime, that I have sought, those sterres by whom I trusted of the port: / My sailes do fall, and I advance right nought” [1.40-42]), Surrey attempts something much more daring. Namely, at one point he subverts the operation of a key Petrarchan trope: “Strange kindes of death, in life that I do trie: / At hand to melt, farre of in flame to burn” (1.17-18). At hand to melt? Not freeze? Replacing the traditional Petrarchan “cryopyric” antithesis (Braden, “Frustration” 8) that contrasts burning and freezing with an asymmetrical opposition of melting and burning, in other words, an opposition barely sustainable in terms of difference, devoid of the original dynamism of the figure and echoing the in-different poetry of Chaucer’s *Man in Black*, Surrey effectively undermines the rhetorical foundations of Petrarchism with its carefully balanced poetics of oxymoron and antithesis (Forster 4; Kennedy, *Rhetorical Norms* 21; Waller, *English Poetry* 75-76). The very first text in what is taken as a Petrarchan collection *par excellence* turns out to be anti-Petrarchan.³¹

Two points invite commentary here. First, instead of rejecting the rhetorical figure altogether, Surrey sabotages it by retaining it in his discourse yet depleting it of poetic efficacy. He turns it into a blind spot over which a reader trained in Petrarchan diction will inevitably stumble, despite immediately recognizing the trope. Surrey’s Petrarchan discourse is not wholly paralyzed by melancholic

³¹ While Surrey’s editors (Padelford 211; E. Jones 110) are puzzled by this deviation from the standard trope, they nevertheless print it the way it is found in all the available sources, although it deviates from Petrarch’s line “*s’arder da lunge et agghiacciar da presso*” [to burn from afar and to freeze close by] (*RVF* 224.12). Surrey, however, is quite capable of employing the same antithesis in an orthodox Petrarchan manner (e.g. “In standing nere my fire, I know how that I freze: / Far of I burn: In both I wast: and so my life I leze” [4.41-42]), which makes this deviation all the more significant. Cf. also Wyatt’s “normative” translation of the same Petrarchan sonnet which Surrey probably knew: “If burning a farre of and fresing nere / Ar cause that by love my self I destroy” (XII.12-13).

asymbolia, but the natural system of courtly signification is disrupted, left open, as it were, vulnerable to self-destruction. Indeed, as Surrey himself explains, “I know and can by roate the tale that I would tel: / But oft the words come furth awrie of him that loveth wel” (4.25-26) – that is, training in Petrarchan diction yields to the pressures of erotic melancholy (“lov[ing] wel”); and although these lines are followed by a faultless deployment of the Petrarchan antithesis (“I know in heat and cold the lover how he shakes / In singing how he doth complain, sleping how he wakes” [4.27-28]), the figure is already irremediably compromised by Surrey’s opening anti-Petrarchan stunt. Second, this stripping of poetic language of meaning is linked to the speaker’s annihilation (“Strange kindes of death, in life that I do trie”). In other words, the rhetorical suicide Surrey undertakes in the quoted lines represents part of a larger picture of melancholic devaluation of the self (“the dead language [that melancholics] speak ... foreshadows their suicide” [Kristeva, *Black Sun* 53]). Rather than an accident, an aberration, or a scribal error, this erosion of the rhetorical norm of Petrarchism, I contend, is a symptom of Surrey’s poetics of melancholy. Surrey takes this process further than anyone else: he is prepared to go as far as destroy his own Petrarchan identity altogether. Death of the subject is one of the options Tottel’s *Miscellany* promises in its opening poem, and as we shall see, the text of the collection eventually confirms these expectations.

Discontent with the Petrarchan self and with the language that constructs it determines the course of the narrative of Surrey’s *Songes and Sonettes*. Though the three poems that follow (2,3, and 4) reiterate the same sensibility of unrequited love and rehash the unadventurous rhetoric of love wounds and Cupid’s fire, the narrative soon takes a less predictable turn. In “When somer toke in hand” (5), a poem that Tottel aptly entitles “Complaint of a lover that defied love, and was by love after the more tormented,” the speaker attempts to reject the power of love over him and thus adopt a non-Petrarchan identity. The rebellious effort proves futile, however. Instead of regaining health and psychic stability, the subject’s self is further shattered by Cupid: “That I, me thought, was made as whole as any man alive, / But here I may perceive mine errour all and some, / For that I thought that so it was: yet was it still undone” (5.38-40). As though echoing the speaker’s failure to extricate him-

self from the power of love (and Petrarchism), Surrey's section continues with a cluster of immaculate Petrarchan sonnets (6-14), including such faithful renderings of Petrarch as "Love, that liveth, and raigneth in my thought" (6), "Set me whereas the Sunne doth parche the grene" (12), and "I never saw my Ladie laye apart" (13),³² which contrast drastically, in terms of form, with the poulter's measures and iambic tetrameters of the first five poems in the collection.³³ The authority of normative Petrarchism appears to be restored.

Placed among these texts, however, is the disturbing poem "When Windsor walles sustained my wearied arme" (11), in which the speaker for the first time comes precariously close to suicide: "My vapord eyes suche drery teares distill, / The tender spring which quicken where they fall, / And I halfbent to throw me down withal" (11.12-14). Though Tottel makes an attempt to posit this sonnet as an amorous piece, the title "How eche thing save the lover in spring reviveth to pleasure" sits uneasily with this pastoral-elegiac poem that juxtaposes images of the spring ("The blossomd bowes with lusty Ver yspred, / The flowred meades, the wedded brides so late / Mine eyes discover" [11.4-6]) with an acute, self-destructive grief for a lost companion, most likely the poet's childhood friend Henry Fitzroy the Duke of Richmond, an illegitimate son of Henry VIII and once a stand-in heir to the English throne. Surrey's sentiment soon becomes even more apparent in the pastoral elegy "So cruell prison how could betide, alas" (15), written, presumably, while Surrey was imprisoned in Windsor for a quarrel with another courtier (Sessions, *Poet* 128-30), that mourns Richmond's death and wistfully looks back on the past days of joy when "I in lust and joy, / With kinges sonne, my childishe yeres did passe, / In greater feastes than Priams sonnes of Troy" (15.2-4). A politically explicit text (which Tottel attempts rather awkwardly to inoculate by means of the title "Prisoned in Windsor, he recounteth his pleasure there passed"), "So cruell prison" performs a number of important functions for Surrey's *Songes and Sonettes*. Reiterating the melancholic tenor of the collection (i.e. nostalgic longing

³² The originals are Petrarch's "*Amor, che nel penser mio vive e regna*" (140), "*Pommi ove 'l sole occide I fiori e l'erba*" (145), and "*Lassare il velo o per sole o per ombra*" (11) respectively.

³³ Cf. Heale, *Wyatt* 87-88, who argues that Surrey's quasi-dramatic monologues in poulter's measure are largely his innovation in early modern English poetry, inspired by vernacular, Chaucerian, paradigms.

for the originary plenitude of the past: “O place of blisse, renuer of my woes” [15.45]) and gesturing towards suicide, it also recasts this problematic in an explicitly literary mould, inscribing Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* (as well as Vergil’s *Aeneid*) as the chief subtext of the poem. In other words, it imagines the lost object in terms of Chaucerian poetry and national identity, not to mention representing the speaker as equal to the king’s son and thus to maintaining a politicized opposition to the Henrician court and its display of absolutist monarchical rule.³⁴

Another important aspect of the two Windsor poems is that they delineate what Stephen Guy-Bray in his discussion of Surrey (*Homoerotic* 103-17) describes as a “homoerotic space” – an interpretive locale where the long-standing tradition of classical elegy, Chaucerian vernacular chivalry, and the poet’s historical friendship with Richmond all stipulate a palpable degree of same-sex desire.³⁵ In fact, re-branding these texts as Petrarchan, Tottel is not far off the mark: by mourning the death of a childhood friend, Surrey takes on the role of a grieving lover and displays “the melancholia of unrequited love” (Peterson 71), although the object of desire is gendered male. In the narrative of *Songes and Sonettes*, however, the homoeroticism of Surrey’s verse can be considered in the light of his anti-Petrarchan experimentation; and it is not accidental that his eroticized elegies for Richmond are almost immediately followed by two other texts that critique the Petrarchan matrix from within, “O happy dames, that may embrace” (17) and “Good Ladies: ye that have your pleasures in exile” (19), in both of which “the female voice is ventriloquised through a Petrarchan diction conventionally attributed to the male lover” (Hiscock 51).³⁶ On the one hand, this relative anomaly – after all, Petrarchan poems were once described as “a theater of desire – one in which men have the active roles and the women are assigned silent, iconic functions, and are notable primarily for their absence from the

³⁴ For readings of the poem along these lines, see Crewe 70-75; Lines; Sessions, *Poet* 135-39.

³⁵ There are a number of excellent studies of homoerotic and homosexual discourse in early modern England, including Bray; Goldberg, *Sodometries*; Hammond; B. Smith; A. Stewart, *Close Readers*.

³⁶ “O happy dames” is especially interesting in this regard as it represents a female response to, or re-writing of, Petrarch’s sonnet “*Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio*” (RVF 189) or, more likely, its English version by Wyatt, “My galy charged with forgetfulness” (XXVIII).

script” (G. Waller, “Struggling” 242³⁷) – can be persuasively explained in biographical terms, by claiming that both poems were written by Surrey for his wife to voice the couple’s mutual discontent with the separation caused by Surrey’s military service in France (Padelford 215, 221; E. Jones 118-19; Sessions *Earl* 77-80).³⁸ On the other hand, read alongside the homoerotic Windsor poems, the female-voiced poems become not accidental or insignificant slippages of gender but socially and culturally, as well as poetically (i.e. within or against Petrarchism), constructed and governed shifts. What takes place within these several poems in the *Songes and Sonettes* is a “queering” of Petrarchism: Surrey’s mode of writing explores what has been recently described by Carla Freccero as “gender incoherence poetically produced through the subject’s difference from itself and thus through the unfixing of some of the subject/object poles of sexual difference in the Petrarchan lyric tradition” (24).³⁹ Feminizing the monolithic model which affords little, if any, textual power to the feminine voice, Surrey presents Petrarchan genders as dialectically interrelated positions which grant the speaker an escape from the rigidity of binarism, a strategy that resonated with the cultural landscapes of the English Renaissance, especially the so-called one-sex model and the ensuing “possibilities of identification across gender facilitated by desires that are not limited by heterosexual choice.”⁴⁰ Surrey’s poems, where gender and desire float freely, unrestrained by diacritical attachments, celebrate the instability of Petrarchan desire and explore liminal spaces where the rigidity of gender poles is exposed to be a product of naturalizing discursive arrangement and not its natural foundation.

³⁷ Female Petrarchism has of course been since recovered and reinstated into the literary canon. See Beilin; A.R. Jones; Smarr; R. Smith.

³⁸ In the sixteenth-century Devonshire manuscript “O happy dames” is transcribed in a female hand, which might have belonged either to Mary Fitzroy (né Howard), Surrey’s sister, or to Mary Shelton, Mary Fitzroy’s friend. See Baron; Goldberg, “Female Pen;” Heale, *Wyatt* 42-46 and “Women.”

³⁹ Freccero draws, among others (Derrida and Butler) on Dubrow, who argues in *Echoes of Desire* that Petrarchism “repeatedly challenges the boundaries between characteristics that might be gendered masculine and feminine” (11).

⁴⁰ The quotation is from Goldberg, *Sodometries* 53 (see 29-62). On the one-sex model in early modern England, see Laqueur 25-148. On textual cross-dressing (i.e. male subjects appropriating a female voice), see Harvey; Orgel 10-31.

At the same time, Surrey's re-gendering of his poetic voice as well as identifying with his dead friend is the product of melancholy and the fragmentation of identity it involves. That Surrey abandons not only his heterosexual object of desire in favour of same-sex love for Richmond but changes the inflection of his poetic "I" from masculine to feminine bespeaks the noxious work of melancholic lovesickness. On the one hand, melancholy is a condition in which, in Neo-Platonic terms, the phantasmatic image of the beloved invades the self of the lover and causes changes in the identity, such as a gender slide. "None of you should be surprised if you have heard that some lover has taken on in his body a certain similarity of likeness to his beloved," Ficino writes, and he continues, "What wonder if the features are so firmly implanted and embedded in the breast by mere thought that they are imprinted on the spirit, and by the spirit are immediately imprinted on the blood?" (164-65). On the other, as a cold and dry humour within the Galenic system that theorized men hotter than women, an excess of melancholy threatens to cool and thus feminize the masculine subject. Another important point not to be missed here is that this melancholic emasculation in Surrey's poems is discursively facilitated by Chaucer, whose *Franklin's Tale* (847-94) constructs a subject-position in which a female speaker separated from her male beloved by the stormy sea articulates her passion, most likely in a company of friends.⁴¹

Within the narrative of Surrey's anti-Petrarchan exploits, as I have suggested, the subject's re-gendering is another facet to the revisions the melancholic speaker dissatisfied with the Petrarchan self available to him undertakes of his subjectivity. The culmination of this process, however, is the ultimate rejection of the "I," a destruction of the subject which Surrey performs in "In winters just returne, when Boreas gan his raigne" (18), a text placed at the very centre of Surrey's section in Tottel's *Miscellany*. Here the meter is altered back to poulter's measure and the speaker's voice reduced to that of a lowly shepherd. The reader finds himself inside a Chaucerian script, in which the shepherd, on a cold winter morning, having taking his herd out of the fold, hears a cry that he unmistakably

⁴¹ Another subtext to this image of a female lover longing for her beloved lost at sea is Virgil's Dido.

bly identifies as belonging to a lover: “And as it is a thing, that lovers have by fittes, / Under a palme I heard one cry, as he had lost his wittes. / Whose voyce did ring so shrill, in uttering of his plaint” (18.5-7). The shepherd rushes towards the sufferer to inquire about the distress and offer consolation (“With teares, for his redresse, I rashly to him ran” [18.27]). In return, this “dying lover refused upon his ladies unjust mistaking of his writing,” as Tottel chooses to characterize him, recounts his story of amorous delight turned to pain:

Who joyed then, but I? who had this worldes bliss?
Who might compare a life to mine, that never thought on this?
But dwelling in this truth, amid my greatest joy,
Is me befallen a greater losse, than Priam had of Troy.
She is reversed clene, and beareth me in hand,
That my deserts have geven her cause to breke this faithful band.
And for my just excuse availeth no defence,
Now knowest thou all. (18.49-56)

Having solicited the shepherd’s promise to vouch for his truthfulness, the hapless lover dies in the speaker’s arms: “Thus, in his wofull state, he yelded up his ghost” (18.65). The melancholy of unrequited love, reaching epic proportions, has claimed its victim, and the speaker, shaken and disturbed, has nothing left to do but bury the dead lover “Where Creseids love, king Priams sonne, the worthy Troilus lay” (18.78), joining together Chaucer and Petrarch in a somber act of melancholic death.

Chaucerian undertones are indeed rife here: leaving aside the obvious intertextual allusions (e.g. “this worldes bliss” is a direct quotation from the *Book of the Duchess*), the structure of the poetic “I” in Surrey’s text replicates the one found in Chaucer’s poem: an aristocratic lover-poet becomes the object of observation and critique for a socially inferior (the shepherd dully acknowledges his low status: “I am (quod I) but poore, and simple in degree: / A shepardes charge I have in hand, unworthy though I be” [18.35-36]) non-lover and non-poet. Yet despite the ostensible simplification of subject-object relations, Surrey’s poem is every word as disturbing as Chaucer’s. For the subject

that dies in this text is the aristocratic Petrarchan lover whose role Surrey has heretofore performed in *Songes and Sonnetes*, however unwilling or quirkily anti-Petrarchan that performance may have been. The Petrarchan poetic self that Surrey has questioned, undermined, and “queered” in a number of texts in “In winters just returne” is undone altogether.

That this death of the self is closely linked to the process of Petrarchan writing is evident from the lover’s complaint itself. Groaning in pain, he blames his agony on courtly discourse:

Thou cursed pen (sayd he) wo worth the bird thee bare,
The man, the knife, and all that made thee, wo be to their share.
Wo worth the time, and place, where I so could endite.
And wo be it yet once againe, the pen that so can write.
Unhappy hand, it had ben happy time for me,
If, when to write thou learned first, unjoynted hadst thou be. (18.15-20)

The motif first introduced in the opening text of Tottel’s *Miscellany* – that a failure of love poetry foreshadows death of the lover – is finally realized eighteen poems later: the Petrarchan self becomes the victim of the very machine of courtly writing that engenders it. In a gesture that surpasses all other radical experiments with Petrarchism, both in England and on the continent, Surrey watches his own poetic subjectivity break down, as though fulfilling the oath of absolute sacrifice he swore to the lord of love in “Love, that liveth, and raigneth in my thought:” “Yet from my lorde shall not my foote remove. / Swete is his death, that takes his end by love” (6.14).⁴²

Yet melancholic writing, it is worth recalling, loses in order to perpetuate: an abandoned self or discourse are kept present in memory and continue to underpin new articulations of subjectivity. Melancholy, shattering the structures of Petrarchan discourse and imploding the poetic self, still preserves them, often in unrecognizable forms, in utterances that follow. Surrey’s Petrarchan suicide is

⁴² It is impossible not to draw parallels between Surrey’s poetic suicide and his rash political actions in 1546-47 (such as changing his coat of arms to include royal insignia and *de facto* publicizing his claims to the English throne) which infuriated Henry VIII and led to Surrey’s arrest, trial, and execution. For details of Surrey’s last days see Sessions, *Poet Earl* 352-417; also A. Fox 287; Hiscock 55.

no exception: although the poet-lover is dead, his identity lingers on, and the self of the humble shepherd, the new “I” that the poem apparently offers as a solution to the anti-Petrarchan crisis, is transformed into a semblance of exactly what it is supposed to replace. Recounting the impact of the Petrarchan lover’s death on him, the shepherd re-conceives himself as another Petrarchan swain:

For pitye though my heart did blede, to se so piteous sight,
My blood from heat to colde oft changed wonders sore:
A thousand troubles there I found I never knew before.
Twene drede and dolour, so my sprites were brought in feare,
That long it was ere I could call to minde, what I did there.
But, as ech thing hath end, so had these paynes of myne:
The furies past, and I my wits restord by length of tyme. (18.68-74)

His subjectivity is engulfed by melancholy, even though he claims to regain his non-courtly pastoral identity before the end of the poem. That is, if Surrey’s poetic suicide is to be read in terms of liberation from Petrarchism (suggested, among others, by the Windsor imprisonment poems [11] and [15]), as a mirroring of Chaucer’s breakaway from French tradition, the new – non-Petrarchan – identity the shepherd is supposed to embody calls this act of anti-Petrarchan defiance into question, for it is written, at least partly, in the language of Petrarchism. Surrey’s anti-Petrarchan revolt, to adopt Judith Butler’s remark she makes *apropos* melancholic subjectivity, is “a rebellion that has been put down, crushed” (190).

It is not surprising, then, that Surrey’s remaining poems in Tottel’s *Miscellany* oscillate between Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism. Praising his beloved as the one whose “beawtie passeth more / The best of yours, I dare wel sayen, / Than doth the sonne, the candle light” (20.3-5), and claiming that he burns and freezes in love, that “Ne may the waves of the salt flood, / Quenche that your beauty set on fire” (28.19-20), the speaker simultaneously can assume the role – one reminiscent of Chaucer’s Pandarus from *Troilus* – of a retired lover no longer involved in the game of love (“And

seldom though I come to court among the rest: / Yet can I judge in colours dim as depe as can the best" [22.3-4]), warning his friend about the abuses of love:

So standes it now with me for my beloved frend,
The case is thine for whom I fele such torment in my mind.
And for thy sake I burne so in my secret brest
That till though know my hole disseise my hart can have no rest.
I see how thine abuse hath wrested so thy wittes,
That all it yelds to thy desire, and folowes the by fittes. (22.7-12)

Reading Tottel's titles is also illuminating: in the space of just several pages, Surrey's lover first "describeth and forsaketh love" (23) and then "declareth his paines and his uncertain joyes, and with only hope recomforteth somewhat his wofull heart" (30). Indeed, no melancholic farewell is ever final, and so the love wound makes its return to the *Songes and Sonettes*:

As oft as I behold and see
The soveraigne beauty that me bound:
The nyer my comfort is to me,
Alas the fresher is my wound.
As flame doth quench by rage of fire,
And runnyng stremes consume by raine:
So doth the sight, that I desire,
Appease my grief and deadly payne,
First when I saw those cristall streames,
Whose beauty made my mortall wound:
I little thought within her beames
So swete a venom to have found. (24.1-12)

Neo-Platonic spirituality and unrequited love in this text unequivocally reference the Petrarchan norm, but at the same time Surrey again undertakes a deconstruction of Petrarchan diction attendant

on the melancholic wound his speaker describes, similar to what he achieves in the opening poem of the collection. That is, he translates Petrarch's *RVF* 48 "*Se mai foco per foco non si spense / né fiume fu giamai secco per pioggia*" ("If fire was never put out by fire, nor river ever made dry by rain") as "As flame doth quench by rage of fire, / And runnyng stremes consume by raine" (24.5-6). Unlike in Petrarch's original where fire and rain are kept in balance within themselves, in Surrey's poem flame eliminates fire, and water is consumed by rain. Formally clinging to the rhetoric of the *Canzoniere*, Surrey again subverts the Petrarchan trope and deprives it of its signifying capacity. An example of melancholic writing, this dissonant poem both engages and rejects Petrarchism; it is neither purely Petrarchan nor anti-Petrarchan as it flickers on both sides of discourse, giving voice to a splintered melancholic subjectivity.

Dissatisfaction with the Petrarchan self that Surrey displays throughout the opening section of the *Songes and Sonettes* finds a continuation in an array of literary identities that the speaker frantically tries on in the remainder of the text. Poets of classical Rome – Martial, Horace, Juvenal – become models for his poetic voice in "Martial, the thinges that do attain" (31), an epigram on the "meanes to attain happy life;" "Of thy life, Thomas, this compasse wel mark" (32), a loose imitation of an Horatian ode; and in the bitter urban satire "Thassirian king in peace, with foule desire" (37). Arising out of Surrey's humanist education, these poems do not simply "advance an ethos of classical Roman rationality and personal control, and provide a simple remedy to suffering caused by the vagaries of courtly love," as Paul Marquis suggests (Introduction xl), but also represent the mutability of his poetic voice which eschews a fixed subject of enunciation. Yet, it is not the classical poets that Surrey wants to embody most fully, but his vernacular contemporary, Thomas Wyatt. In a series of four poems (33-36) Surrey envisions Wyatt as the new archetypal English poet who "reft Chaucer the glory of his wit" (35.14), a paragon of manliness, honour, and nobility pinned against the deplorable and corrupt courtly environment (see Sessions, "Surrey's Wyatt"). Tellingly, though, this melancholic (and again almost homoerotic) invocation of a *dead* poet (another lost object) is accompanied by yet another reshaping of the poetic subject: lamenting Wyatt's untimely death and elevating him as the

new object of imitation for subsequent generations of writers, Surrey, as though oblivious of his own self, assumes Wyatt's identity, which is particularly noticeable in "W. resteth here, that quick could never rest" (35). Dropping all singular first-person pronouns, departing from his own polished style, and adopting Wyatt's relatively rough meter and diction, Surrey professes an uncanny fidelity to Wyatt's spirit which "reveals itself more subtly through Surrey's pervasive implication that Wyatt himself is the creator of the poem" (Tromly 377). Surrey's apparent withdrawal from the discourse of courtly love does not amount to a step away from melancholy poetics. On the contrary, imitating Wyatt's subjectivity betrays again the fractured self that the speaker has displayed throughout the section, a self destabilized and dissolved by melancholy which never provides a route to solidify the splintered ego into a new coherent self.

Indeed, much as Surrey wants to immunize the readers against associating Wyatt with courtly poetics (the only text he ever mentions is Wyatt's *Penitential Psalms*), Petrarchan melancholy still persists. The last three poems all restate a certain inescapability of the subject from internal division brought about by lovesickness; pointing to a resolution, they all contain a caveat that belies the promise of recuperated selfhood. In "The stormes are past these cloudes are overblowne" (which Tottel uncharacteristically titles "*Bonum est mihi quod humiliasti me*" [39], delicately emphasizing another modulation in poetic voice, this time a tip towards psalmic authority), the speaker claims that

in the hart where heapes of griefes were growne,
The swete revenge hath planted mirth and rest,
No company so pleasant as mine owne.
Thraldom at large hath made this prison fre,
Danger well past remembred workes delight:
Of lingring doutes such hope is sprong pardie,
That nought I finde displeasaunt in my sight:
But when my glasse presented unto me
The curelesse wound that bledeth day and night. (39.5-13)

Presented with his self-image, the poet slips into what reads almost as a retraction of the previous statement. The wound, whether it be literal or metaphorical (its ambiguity is probably deliberate), continues to be the foundation of his subjectivity; even if it should heal, the scars will remain, as Surrey himself affirms, openly quoting Wyatt: “Yet Salomon said, the wronged shall recure: / But Wiat said true, the skarre doe aye endure” (40.5-6). Such is the fate of all who are lovesick, however. In the words of Laurentius, “being taken away [from their love object], the diseased partie will finde himselfe marueilously relieued, though notwithstanding there may remaine behinde some certaine prints and skarres in the bodie” (121).

The final text of Surrey’s *Songes and Sonettes* encapsulates the melancholic poetics of unresolved conflict within the self which translates into a mode of writing which is divided between the past and the present:

The fansy, which that I have served long,
That hath alway bene enmy to myne ease,
Semed of late to rue upon my wrong,
And bad me flye the cause of my misease.
And I forthwith dyd prease out of the throng,
That thought by flight my painfull hart to please
Som other way: tyll I saw faith more strong:
And to my self I said: alas, those daies
In vayn were spent, to runne the race so long.
And with that thought, I met my guyde, that playn
Out of the way wherin I wandred wrong,
Brought me amiddes the hylles, in base Bullayn:
Where I am now, as restlesse to remayn,
Against my will, full pleased with my payn. (41)

Bidding farewell to an illusion (erotic? political? poetic?) that has long tormented him, the speaker only finds himself trapped in Boulogne, where he is “restlesse to remayn / Against [his] will.” Liberation turns out to be another form of imprisonment, physical and textual, because the poem, to adopt Paul de Man’s phrase, “simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode” (17). By labeling the poem “The fansie of a weried lover,” Tottel switches the registers of public/private poetry and re-directs the reader’s attention back to Surrey’s uneasy dialogue with Petrarchism. If this last poem of the collection finalizes the poet’s departure from the Petrarchan fantasy, the choice of a sonnet form – albeit, curiously, one that conforms to neither Italian nor English pattern – is at best dubious. Also, apparently having dealt away with Petrarchan diction and put it behind him, Surrey’s “weried lover” concludes with a Petrarchan figure *par excellence*, “full pleased with my payn,” which restores Petrarchism to its pride of place. The poem’s anti-Petrarchan ethos negates its Petrarchan form, but the discourse of Petrarchism continues to dictate the terms in which the poet’s rejection of his Petrarchan identity is written. This ambivalence, however, is deeply entrenched in the poetics of melancholy. In melancholy, “identification becomes a magical, a psychic form of preserving the object ... [and] the lost object continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications” (Butler, *Psychic Life* 134). The lost, or rejected, Petrarchan self in Surrey’s poetry is likewise never expunged from discourse but only fantasized as abandoned. On the contrary, it is always present in the background, as memory, offering a point of reference against which anti-Petrarchan identifications take place.

The Surrey of *Songes and Sonettes*, as a linear reading demonstrates, is far from a technically skillful but conventional Petrarchan imitator. Rather, he is a daring and self-reflective poet for whom Petrarchism represents not a fixed order of discourse containing a prescribed subject position, but a space of re-writing and poetic experimentation. Adopting Petrarchan language, Surrey seeks to explore the cracks within its system of signification, to expose its mechanisms of power, and to write himself into the empty spaces of anti-Petrarchism that surround the seemingly unshakable edifice of Petrarchan writing. It needs to be stressed, however, that Surrey not only undercuts the authority of

Petrarchism in England and thus, cataphorically, paves the way for the anti-Petrarchan manner of Sidney, Shakespeare, and Donne, but also gestures, anaphorically, towards the Chaucerian past of English courtly writing and achieves the same effect as Chaucer in the *Book of the Duchess*. Original and unprecedented though his radical revisions of Petrarchism may be in the context of Tudor England, they powerfully echo Chaucer's medieval reconfiguration of French courtliness. The subject of melancholy persists in English poetry in the form of a splintering literary identity that, by dint of its alienation from poetic language, inevitably implies a self-reflective rearrangement of discourse. As the example of Surrey confirms, Chaucerian melancholy underpins much of the English love poetry written in a continental mode. In this sense, what appears to be Surrey's proleptic anti-Petrarchism is less the discovery of a pioneering voice in the vernacular, but rather a re-discovery, or a reminder, of the risks – such as the disintegration of subjectivity and poetic asymbolia – that melancholic writing about love in English entails. Though Surrey's splintering of the Petrarchan subject constitutes a more immediate pretext for Sidney's divided selfhood, it is Chaucerian melancholy that, in the end, determines the contours of this subject-position in early modern English poetry.

“Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed:” The Subject of Melancholy in *Astrophil and Stella*

Astrophil is melancholic. He knows it and, boasting enviable medical knowledge of the malady, turns sonnet 23 into an exercise in self-diagnosis:

The curious wits, seeing dull pensiveness
Bewray it self in my long-setled eyes,
Whence those same fumes of melancholy rise,
With idle paines and missing ayme do guesse.
Some, that know how my spring I did addressse,
Deeme that my Muse some fruit of knowledge plies:

Others, because the Prince my service tries,
 Thinke that I thinke state errors to redress.
 But harder Judges judge ambition's rage,
 Scourge of it selfe, still climbing slipprie place,
 Holds my young brain captiv'd in golden cage.
 O fooles, or over-wise, alas the race
 Of all my thoughts hath neither stop nor start,
 But only *Stella's* eyes and *Stella's* heart.⁴³

The speaker makes no mystery of the humoural causes of his affliction, blaming it on the atrabilious vapours (“those same fumes of melancholy”) that percolate through his body, making him sad and pensive. He admits, however, that his symptoms can have different etiological explanations, reiterating my earlier observation on the elusiveness of boundaries between various kinds of melancholy, both natural and unnatural. It is possible that his melancholy is of a scholarly nature, the product of plying “the fruit of knowledge,” just as it is possible that his condition could be linked to his political career and attempts “state errors to redresse.” Lemnius, invoking the classical Aristotelian formula, notes in his *Touchstone of Complexions* that those subject to melancholy most often include “Magistrates and officers of the Commonwealth, or Studentes which at vnseasonable turnes sit at their Bookes & Studies. For through ouermuch agitation of the mynd, natural heat is extinguished...” (135^v). Or perhaps Astrophil’s melancholy stems from “myssing and beyng disappointed of some great desyre and expectation, which they hoped and had, of some thing to come to passe” (Lemnius 143^v), that is, from what Sidney calls thwarted “ambition’s rage” “still climbing slipprie place.” After all, elsewhere in the sequence Astrophil confesses the sin of “*Ambition*” (27.11) and admits that “... to my birth I owe / Nobler desires, least else that friendly foe, / Great expectation, weare a traine of shame” (21.6-8).

⁴³ All citations of *Astrophil and Stella* are from *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, quoted by poem and line number.

In the end Astrophil brushes these explanations aside, positing his love for Stella – that is, erotic melancholy – as the mechanism that orchestrates the dynamic of his selfhood. By his own account, he has been injured by Cupid’s blow (“Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot / Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed” [2.1-2]) and now bears an incurable wound that threatens his own life and the existence of those around him (“Flie, fly, my friends, I have my death wound; fly” [20.1-4; cf. 48.9-14; V.49-54]). He is sleepless (32; 39; 40, 99), most likely due to the “blacke and darke fumes of melancholie, rising vp to the brain, whereof the fatansie forgeth objects, and disturbeth the sleep of melancholy persons” (Bright 131);⁴⁴ and morbidly fixated on the object of his desire so that minute details of her appearance, demeanor, and speech become his *raison d’être*, betraying a mighty disturbance in the estimative faculty of his brain (“I would know whether she did sit or walke, / How cloth’d, how waited on, sighd she or smild, / Whereof, with whom, how often did she talke ...” [92.9-11]). He sighs and cries abundantly (61, 67, 95, 104, Song 8) and prefers solitude and silence to company (“Because I oft in darke abstracted guise / Seeme most alone in greatest companie, / With dearth of words, or answers quite awrie” [27.1-3]). All of these are textbook qualities of a melancholic, since one “shall find [him] weeping, sobbing, sighing, and redoubling his sighs, and in continuall restlesnes, auoyding company, louing solitarines, the better to feed & follow his foolish imaginations” (Laurentius 118). The principal colour of Astrophil’s world is black (the words “black” and “darke” occur 38 times in the sequence). Like so many other “melancholike persons [who have] in their braine a continuall night” (Laurentius 90), in Astrophil’s inner world “a darknes & cloudes of melancholie vapours ... obscure the clearenes” (Bright 102). He feels guilty about loving Stella (4, 5, 14, 86) and expresses self-loathing (“But thou art gone, now that self felt disgrace / Doth make me most to wish thy comfort neere” [106.7-8]).

It is perhaps the fact that these salient manifestations of lovesickness are so self-evident that explains why critics have all but ignored the subject of melancholy in their studies of *Astrophil and*

⁴⁴ In 32, like the narrator in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, Astrophil calls on Morpheus, the god of sleep, a parallel noted by Roche (200); on the ubiquity of insomnia as a melancholic symptom among Elizabethan writers see Babb 31; John 87-92.

Stella.⁴⁵ After all, if all Petrarchan lovers are melancholic, why would a thematic explication of Astrophil through this lens be a fruitful scholarly enterprise? As I would like to argue, however, there is more to these symptoms than Sidney's investment in his character's verisimilitude. Melancholy not merely supplies a subject matter for Sidney's cycle but determines its textual logic, namely, a fragmentation of the "I" and its dissolution into a series of quasi-theatrical performances of identity. In this sense, I suggest, the melancholy that saturates Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* is of a Chaucerian brand. Of course there is nothing new to the claim of Sidney's fractured subjectivity. In the words of Gary Waller, in *Astrophil and Stella* we find ourselves "in the presence of a continually decentered self that searches for fixity through the endless dissemination of language" ("Rewriting" 78; cf. Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 76). What I seek to demonstrate in the following pages, however, is that in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* – a text concerned first and foremost with exploration of erotic desire – it is melancholy (rather than linguistic alienation, social contradiction, or Protestant ethics) that prevents the subject from sustaining a coherent, stable identity. Moreover, I contend, melancholy elucidates the speaker's uneasy relationship with the tradition of Petrarchan writing. The ambivalent position *Astrophil and Stella* assumes between Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism, I suggest, arises out of what I have termed the poetics, or aesthetics, of melancholy – a form of writing that is premised on simultaneous disavowal and preservation of a literary discourse.

If we look to *Astrophil and Stella*, we discover that Sidney's sequence is organized around a melancholic rupture of identity, of an ego turning on or even against itself. The name of the cycle's protagonist, Astro/Phil, is one of the crucial sites that embody the logic of melancholic object-introjection and identification outlined above. On the one hand, the speaker identifies with Stella, which is reflected in the Greek version of her name (Astra) being incorporated into that of the desiring speaker. On the other hand, the compound Astro/Phil couples Philip (Sidney) and his textual crea-

⁴⁵ Babb discusses Sidney's *Arcadia* but does not mention *Astrophil and Stella* (168-70). More recently, in her Kristevan reading of Sidney's sonnets, Catherine Bates ("Manic Wit") discusses melancholy as one of the mechanisms of producing abjection, the focus of her essay (4-5), but does not probe melancholy in connection with the sequence.

tion, Astrophil, who are thus torn apart and yet inextricably yoked together. The opening sonnet of the sequence stages a psychomachia of the two aspects of the speaker's identity:

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sun-burn'd brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
Invention, Natures child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes,
And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helplesse in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,
'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart, and write.' (1)

At the heart of the sonnet lies a conflict between true loving, authenticity, inwardness, poetic originality, and anti-Petrarchism on the one hand (“‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me, ‘looke in thy heart, and write’”), and immoral lasciviousness, writing, falsity, exteriority, and stock Petrarchan poetics (“Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow / Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sun-burn'd brain. / But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay”) on the other. These roles can be imagined as occupied by Sidney and Astrophil who are engaged in a scenario of melancholic critique: “the poet, Sidney, can watch the lover, Astrophel, in the act of loving and can make observa-

tions and insinuate references about his success. By the same token, Sidney can also comment upon Astrophel's practice as a poet" (Heninger 82; cf. Kalstone 133).⁴⁶

There are echoes here of the dreamer's conversation with the Man in Black from the *Book of the Duchess*, or perhaps even of the narrator's detached reporting of Troilus's attempt at Petrarchan sonneteering in Chaucer's romance. However, similar to what we have seen in Chaucer, the distinction between the two aspects of the "I" is rendered deliberately suspect. In Edward Berry's succinct wording, in *Astrophil and Stella*

Sidney creates a poetic form in which both the speaker and authorial voice are radically ambiguous ... a sonnet sequence in which the speaker, although insistently identified with the author, is contained by a narrative design and an authorial voice that subject him to consistent irony; to complicate matters even further, at any moment ... the irony may dissipate and the authorial voice become sympathetically aligned with the speaker himself. (102, 108)

Indeed, as the very first line of the sequence declares, programmatically, "loving" *is* opposed to "showing in verse" (i.e. representation in writing), but the operator "faine" linking the two betrays a sense of urgency ("obliged," according to the *OED*) regarding the creation of a fictional poet to express the lover's desire ("I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe"). The lover cannot exist without the poet. Writing and loving cannot be readily distinguished, whatever claims be made to the contrary.

One of the most striking instances of indeterminacy that surrounds the ego-cleavage is sonnet 34, where the two agencies become so diverged that they engage in a polemic about the values of courtly love and amorous poetry:

Come, let me write, 'And to what end?' To ease

A burthned heart. 'How can words ease, which are

⁴⁶ On the split between Sidney and Astrophil, predominantly with Astrophil portrayed as a negative example (e.g. of immoral passion) that Sidney himself does not condone, see Montgomery; Roche 193-242; J. Scanlon; Sinfield, "Self-Deception" and "Sidney and Astrophil."

The glasses of thy dayly vexing care?
 Oft cruel fights well pictured forth do please.
 ‘Art not asham’d to publish thy disease?’
 Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare:
 ‘But will not wise men thinke thy words fond ware?’
 Then be they close, and so none shall displease.
 ‘What idler thing then speake and not be hard?’
 What harder thing then smart and not to speake?
 Peace, foolish wit, with wit my wit is mard.
 Thus write I while I doubt to write, and wreake
 My harmes in Ink’s poore losse, perhaps some find
Stella’s great powrs, that so confuse my mind.

Behind the ostensibly dialogic organization of the sonnet, however, it is easy to overlook the fact that the differentiation of the two aspects of the “I” is rather problematic. For readers of the early modern editions of Sidney the poem would have appeared even more disturbing since the absence of quotation marks made the distinction all but impossible, blurring attributions and identities. But even today this internal conversation betrays a massive instability that accompanies every use of “I” in the sequence: Sidney/Astrophil are both forced to fall back on the same pronoun in order to express their subjectivity. “Thus write I while I doubt to write,” Sidney (or Astrophil?) exclaims, but the substitutability of the signifier besets both projects, of writing and of poetic reflection. Though occasional slippages from the first to third person pronoun, as in “Therewithall away she went, / Leaving *him* so passion rent, / ... That therewith *my* song is broken” (Song 8, 101-02,104, emphasis added), suggest that autoreflexive work undeniably takes place within the poetic subject, we are not dealing here with a mere subject-object relation. In Chaucerian terms, Astrophil is not just the black knight under the microscope of Sidney the dreamer. Rather, given that Sidney’s “attempts to distinguish himself from the speaker are limited at best” (Dubrow, *Echoes* 101), the sequence is built around a continuous

splintering of the ego into multiple sub-subject positions where one “I” is always difficult to differentiate from another (“I am not I; pitie the tale of me” [45.14]). Every self is and is not the same at once. When the speaker cries, “I might, unhappie word, ô me, I might, / And then would not, or could not see my bliss” (33.1-2), we presume that he refers to the subtleties of early modern modality, but the same reading – and the same tag of “unhappie word” – can be applied to the first-person pronoun. Every self is divisible, unstable, splintered. Because of “*Stella*’s great powrs, that so confuse [his] mind” (35.14), Astrophil’s ego defies coherence and becomes a series of misrecognitions, what Sidney himself calls “those civill warres” in him (39.7).

The melancholic Sidneian subject is thus, in psychoanalytic terms, “nowhere properly itself, given that it never avoids yielding to an identification and always confuses itself in some way with another (an alter ego – but one that is neither other nor self)” (Borch-Jakobsen 21). As in Chaucer’s poem, however, the dispersal of subjectivity in *Astrophil and Stella* is not confined to a poet/lover split. The mechanism of melancholia, both pre-modern and modern, involves an endless process of identifications within the limits of the same self, not so much erasure of the original self but a continuous re-structuring – re-writing – of the ego through a series of assumed identities. All these identifications are driven by the subject’s desire to fulfill his wish, that is, to obtain Stella, but it appears, Borch-Jakobsen remarks, “as if wish fulfillment did not so much consist in *having* the object as in *being* the one who possesses it: a slight difference, an initially imperceptible nuance that liberates the fabulous space of fantasy in which a world of heroes is already stirring” (18). *Astrophil and Stella* is indeed a “world of heroes,” or, to use a phrase from an early modern medical text, of its protagonist’s “phantasticall imaginations.” In sonnet 1 the speaker slips from a lover to a writer, then from an assiduous reader of poetry to a truant schoolboy, before becoming a birthing woman, self-loathing, anxious, and in pain, and turning back into a writer. But the sequence as a whole enlarges this melancholic dynamic by staging a histrionic proliferation of new forms of subjectivity. If in the opening sonnet Sidney’s melancholic subject – like Surrey before him – depreciates his gender, in the next poem his national identity and social position are undone: “Now even that footstep of lost libertie / Is

gone, and now like slave-borne *Muscovite*, / I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie” (2.9-11), a desperate cry of belittled selfhood also repeated in 47: “What, have I thus betrayed my liberties? / ... or am I born a slave, / Whose necke becomes such yoke of tyranny?” (1, 3-4; cf. 29.14; 86.9). The speaker further identifies with proverbial heroes of classical mythology such as Narcissus, Paris, and Hercules (82), and imagines himself one of Cupid’s kin (65, 73). From an educated and sophisticated courtier, Astrophil becomes an immature schoolboy (1, 3, 46, 56, 73, 79); and as a diligent Neo-Platonic lover, he suspends his gender and identifies with Stella herself (36, 87, 90, 94, 107).⁴⁷ If in the opening sonnet Astrophil is a woman with child, in 37.2 his thoughts go into labour and by 50.10-11 he becomes the mother of stillborn babies.

Even Astrophil’s humanity is placed under erasure. If in his *Apologie* Sidney confesses that Pugliano, his riding master in Vienna, with his praises of horsemanship made him wish to be a horse (“if I had not beene a peece of a Logician before I came to him, I think he would haue perswaded mee to haue wished myselfe a horse” [150]), in *Astrophil and Stella* he is a horse:

I on my horse, and *Love* on me doth trie
 Our horsemanships, while by strange worke I prove
 A horsman to my horse, a horse to *Love*,
 And now man’s wrongs in me, poor beast, descrie.

and while I spurre

My horse, he spurres with sharpe desire my hart:
 He sits me fast, however I do sturre:
 And now hath made me to his hand so right,
 That in the Manage my selfe take delight. (49.1-4,10-14)

⁴⁷ For Astrophil’s self-presentation as a schoolboy, see Klein 82-6; Lowenstein; Strycharski; for his identification with Stella, Hull 182-9.

The speaker here not only imagines himself an animal but delights in his beastly condition and is happy to forget his human self altogether. It must be added here, however, that it is not so difficult for Sidney to be a horse as his Greek name Philippos (“horse-lover”) already incorporates an equine identity; as a readily available alter ego and half-namesake for the poet, Astrophil is always already a horse (Paul Miller 515-18). Elsewhere in the sequence Astrophil, realizing that his human body can ill assist him in his desire to possess Stella, dreams of dehumanizing self-transformations into a double of Stella’s puppy (59) or into a parrot, a quasi-Chaucerian lascivious fowle (fool or foule?), ironically named Philip (87; cf. 108.6-8), since they both have free physical access to Stella. That these identifications are melancholic is confirmed by a number of pre-modern medical tracts that name among manifestations of melancholy oblivion of the human self and appropriation of an animal identity instead. “Some thinke,” Burton writes, “they are beasts, wolves, hogges, and cry like dogges, foxes, bray like asses, and low like kine” (1:401). Burton’s words echo Ficino’s observation that in the madness of love “a man is brought down below the species of man and in some degree is changed from a man into a beast” (158).⁴⁸ Indeed he who loves Stella “all selfness he forbeares” (61.7).

On the basis of this evidence, it is possible to characterize Astrophil’s melancholic self – indeed any melancholic self – as “essentially theatrical” (Schiesari 236; cf. Lyons 94). Unfettered by a stable discourse or subject position, Kristeva writes, a melancholic ego “asserts itself on the field of artifice: there is a place for the “I” only in play, in theater, behind the masks of possible identities” (*Black Sun* 145). Interestingly, the psychoanalytic notion of melancholy as a thespian merry-go-round of identifications is not far removed from the pre-modern understanding: like drunkards, Lemnius writes, melancholics “are ledde with many affections and phansies, gybing and gesturing as though

⁴⁸ Heffernan also quotes Galen, who writes that “one patient believes that he has been turned into a kind of snail and therefore runs away from everyone lest [its shell] should get crushed” (12); and Oribasius, who discusses lycanthropy, a special class of melancholy which forces people “to imitate wolves in all things” (15, also 47), although Oribasius (as well as his countryman Paul of Aegina, writing a few centuries later) never fully identifies lycanthropy with melancholy or lovesickness (Beecher and Ciavolella 59-60; Jackson 345-51). We discover a similar motif in Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, where the dream pattern brings the narrator face to face with a projection of his unrequited desire to (know) love, taking the form of a raucous assembly of birds.

they were Stage Players” (149^v); to see a melancholic, Burton agrees, is to “see a man turne himselfe into all shapes like a Camelion, or as *Proteus, omnia transformans sese in miracula rerum*, to act twenty parts and persons at once, for his advantage, to temporize and vary like *Mercury* the Planet, good with good; bad with bad; having a several face, garb, and character for every one he meets; of all religions, humours, inclinations” (1:52). This aptly describes Astrophil who takes on the roles of first a tragic (46) and then a comic (51) character, and the choice of genres here is not accidental. Timothy Bright compares the progress of melancholy with “the comedy turned into tragedy, pleasantness into fury, & in the end, mirth into mourning” while in unnatural melancholy, caused by the burning of blood through internal heat, “euery serious thing for a time, is turned into a jest, & tragedies into comedies, and lamentation into gigges and daunces” (164-65, 111). Meanwhile, Burton, in lieu of his introduction to the matter of love melancholy, announces: “I am resolved ... boldly to shew my selfe in this common Stage, and in this Tragi-comedy of Love, to Act severall parts, some Satyrically, some Comically, some in mixt Tone, as the subject I have in hand gives occasion, and present Sceane shall require or offer it selfe” (3:8). It is also worth recalling that early readers already characterized *Astrophil and Stella* as tragicomedy. Thomas Nashe, in his preface to the 1591 pirated edition describes Sidney’s sequence as a “Theatre of pleasure, for here you shal find a paper stage streud with pearle, an artificial heau’n to ouershadow the fair frame, & christol wals to encounter your curious eyes, whiles the tragiccommodity of loue is performed by starlight ... The argument cruell chastitie, the Prologue hope, the Epilogue dispaire...” (*Syr P.S. His Astrophel and Stella* A3^f). Like a tragicomic character trapped between categories, Astrophil, to adopt Sidney’s own words from *An Apology*, obtains “neither decencie nor discretion ... neither admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulnes ... by [this] mungrell Tragy-comedie” (199).

This melancholic performance of the self also accounts for *Astrophil and Stella*'s discontinuous form torn between lyric and narrative.⁴⁹ The insufficiency of the self manifested in the opening sonnet of the sequence makes a search for alternative identities the driving force behind the development of the plot. While individual poems deconstruct Astrophil's lyric subjectivity (class, nationality, gender, humanity), the overarching narrative, if intermittent, is that of apparently chaotic gliding from one identity to another. Each separate subject-position that Sidney constructs in *Astrophil and Stella* ultimately depends upon its self-erasure and temporary replacement with another, which generates an effect of narrative drift. Despite a strong diegetic plot with a beginning, climax, and conclusion, however, teleological character-development in *Astrophil and Stella* is an illusion: instead of solidifying the self through narrative linearity, Astrophil is engaged in an endless kaleidoscopic performance of shattered – and therefore lyric – subjectivity that fails to coagulate into a fixed "I." That is, rather than to move forward, Sidney's sonnet sequence is repeatedly drawn into a repetitive lyric temporality that subverts any positive development of the protagonist. As Marion Campbell formulates it, "[n]o consistent psychological or narrative structure can be identified in *Astrophil and Stella* because the poem ... dramatizes the process of creating a self and of narrating that self's history without those processes ever crystallizing into the product of a self created or a story told" (93); whereas in the words of Roland Greene, the sequence "creates a strong character within a certain emotional setting but shows difficulty in moving him or her about for a dynamic resolution" (*Post-Petrarchism* 102).

One of the most vivid examples of such narrative insufficiency is the romance sub-plot in *Astrophil and Stella*. In a series of sonnets (37, 41, 49, 53, and 69) Sidney forces Astrophil to play the role of an aristocratic knight errant, a typical protagonist of chivalric romance, but the courtly plot fails miserably as in the end the speaker still lacks a stabilized self, despite his repeated attempts to identify with the chivalric image carved for him by the text. After a formulaic opening announcing the tale of Astrophil's adventures ("Listen then Lordings with good eare to me, / For of my life I must

⁴⁹ On the narrative/lyric tension as one of the key ideologemes of Petrarchan poetry see Dubrow, *Echoes* 28-35. See also an intriguing albeit challenging discussion of the irregular, ruptured rhythm and complex temporality of *Astrophil and Stella* in Kuin 56-76, esp. 63-64, 67-68.

a riddle tell” [37.3-4]), which casts him as a suitor to a courtly lady, Stella, the speaker participates in a tournament where he celebrates victory (“Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance / Guided so well, that I obtain’d the prize” [41.1-2]), thanks to Stella having deigned to look at him: “. . . the true cause is, / *Stella* lookt on, and from her heavenly face / Set forth the beames, which made so faire my race” (41.12-14). In sonnet 49, however, as we have seen, the chivalric identity begins to disintegrate as he not simply identifies with his horse, but becomes a horse of Love, a process of identity subversion which reaches its climax in Sonnet 53, where the speaker’s love for Stella proves to be his undoing: looking at her, he loses the fight. Romance narrative is undermined by lyric desire when *amor hereos*, which is “both a potentially ennobling illness *and* a disabling ‘bestly passion’” (M. A. Wells 30), having first elevated the speaker, brings him down.

While this defeat of romance ideology (and of stable subjectivity in general) in the sequence can be interpreted historically, as a representation of Sidney’s political and social disappointments,⁵⁰ we must not overlook the persistence of melancholy whose presence thwarts the narrativizing aspiration of *Astrophil and Stella*. As Kristeva writes, “[a]ny narrative already assumes that there is an identity stabilized by a completed Oedipus and that, having completed the loss of Thing [i.e. the maternal/Real], it can concatenate its adventures through failures and conquests of the “objects” of desire” (*Black Sun* 161). Yet, what the speaker in *Astrophil and Stella* ostensibly lacks is a stabilized (and thus stabilizing) identity that has rejected the past. Rather, the Sidneian subject is constantly beckoned

⁵⁰ As students of Sidney’s life and work will recall, young Philip was a man of exceptional promise, but all of his career as an Elizabethan courtier appears to have been paved with failure and inevitable frustration. Born a nephew of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in 1554, Sidney remained without a title until 1583, when he was knighted, somewhat reluctantly, to meet the demands of diplomatic protocol. Long considered heir apparent to Leicester, he was displaced by Leicester’s son born around 1580-81. While employed on various diplomatic missions in Europe, he was still regarded with suspicion at court, partly due to his ardour in the pursuit of a Protestant league; and his opposition to the Queen’s marriage to the Duke of Alençon further decreased his chances of a brilliant career. He waited for a meaningful appointment for almost all his life, yet the one he received, that of the governor of Flushing, resulted in his death soon after. See Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney* esp. 1-62, 194-250, passim; A. Stewart, *Philip Sidney*. On the social and political subtext of *Astrophil and Stella*, including the tournament sonnets, see Jones and Stallybrass; Marotti, ““Love is not Love”” 396-406; McCoy, *Rebellion* 69-109; Paul Miller; Herman, *Squitter-wits* 95-122; Klein 70-76; Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 74-92. Paul Miller’s article is particularly useful in linking Astrophil’s shattered knighthood to the historical context of Sidney’s life and times.

back, unable to detach himself from the originary loss (of the self). As a result of this melancholic nostalgia, the romance project fails, for the speaker rejects the linearity of narrative and thus the stability of a subject-position in the symbolic order, opting out instead for an unfinished (i.e. melancholic) form of lyric subjectivity that defies closure and prevents the narrative from reaching a final resolution. As the lines “O joy, too high for my low stile to show: / O blisse, fit for a nobler state than me” (69.1-2) suggest, the speaker’s lyric subjectivity (“low stile”) is incompatible with a heroic narrative plot (“a nobler state than me”).

The closest Astrophil comes to stabilizing his identity is when Stella agrees, conditionally, to share Astrophil’s love (“For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine, / Of her high heart giv’n me the monarchie” [69.9-10]), dispersing the gloom of melancholy. Crying in ecstasy, “I, I, ô I may say, that she is mine” (69.11), Astrophil, through the frenzied repetition of the signifier (in various forms “I, “me” or “my” occur 15 times in the sonnet), appears to organize multiple subject-positions into one coherent self. His bliss, however, is short-lived. After sonnet 86, which registers “[a] change of lookes” in Stella (86.1), Astrophil’s previous symptoms resurface in an exacerbated form. He is again smothered with sighs (“Only true sighs, you do not go away” [95.12]) while “the blacke horrors of the silent night, / Paint woe’s blacke face so lively to [his] sight” (98.9-10). Indeed the sun never once rises for Astrophil between sonnets 89 and 99. He again embraces self-loathing (“If I / Have chang’d desert, let mine own conscience be / A still felt plague, to selfe condemning me: / Let wo gripe on my heart, shame load mine eye” [86.1-4]) and guilt (“I have (live I and know this) harmed thee, / Tho worlds quite me, shall I myself forgive?” [93.101]), and both emotions will persist through the rest of the sequence (“But thou art gone, now that self felt disgrace / Doth make me most to wish thy comfort neere” [106.7-8]). He imagines his separation from Stella as a fall from grace, exclaiming that “No doome should make one’s heav’n become his hell” (86.14). Such a cross-breed of heaven and hell is a also sign of melancholic condition. According to Walkington’s *Optick glasse*, a melancholic’s “soule is either wrapt vp into an Elysium and paradise of blesse by a heauenly contemplation, or in a direfull hellish purgatory by a cynicall meditation” (64^v).

The fracturing of Astrophil's subjectivity is also propelled by an alienation from language that the poetics of melancholy entails. In Sonnet 27 Astrophil's love for Stella turns him into a melancholic whose speech is characterized by "dearth of words, and answers quite awrie" (3). In 55, the speaker, while admitting that in the past his use of words was governed by the rules of poetic language and rhetoric ("Muses, I oft invoked your holy ayde, / With choisest flowers my speech to engarland so / [...] / And oft whole troupes of saddest words I staid" [55.1-2,5]), rejects such linguistic normativity and chooses instead to reduce his speech to just one word, his beloved's name, and to turn the linguistic sign into an inarticulate cry: "But now I meane no more your helpe to try, / Nor other sugring of my speech to prove, / But on her name incessantly to crie" (55.9-11). In 63 Astrophil is bent on mischievously exploiting the rules of grammar in order to interpret Stella's negative answer "No, No" (8) as positive and satisfy his desire. Elsewhere he is in search of "thorowest words, fit for woe's selfe to grone" (57.8), i.e. of pre-symbolic, animalistic sounds that would sooner achieve the desired effect on Stella: he hopes that "[h]er soule, arm'd but with a dainty rinde / Should soone be pierc'd with sharpnesse of the mone" (57.7-8). The words of love, Astrophil discovers, are impotent in themselves unless accompanied by bodily manifestations, such as sobs, groans, and moans: "What sobs can give words grace my grief to show?" (93.2).

In 94 – a sonnet that comes from the last, more bitter part of Sidney's sequence, when any hope of winning Stella is dashed forever – Astrophil's mind is again so overwhelmed by vapours of black bile his hopelessly unrequited love has generated that he claims he cannot utter a single word to articulate the pain. All that is left for him is to implore his own Grief to utter his complaint so that Astrophil can, vicariously, verbalize his heartache. If Grief cannot – or will not – speak for him, the lover urges it at least to wail, believing that these primitive sounds are still preferable to his own love-sick silence:

Do thou then (for thou canst) do thou complaine,
 For my poore soule, which now that sicknesse tries,
 Which even to sence, sence of it selfe denies,

Though harbengers of death lodge there his train.
 Or if thy love of plaint yet mine forbears,
 As of a caitife worthy so to die,
 Yet waile thy selfe, and waile with causefull teares,
 That though in wretchednesse thy life doth lie,
 Yet growest more wretched then by nature beares,
 By being placed in such a wretch as I. (94.5-14)

That is, in Astrophil's world speech (the "symbolic") is displaced by what Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (19-106) and elsewhere terms the "semiotic." The latter is the cumulative manifestation of originary energies (closely associated with the maternal) that move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such by the symbolic order of language and culture. These drives are governed by the primary processes of displacement and condensation which are later superseded by the secondary processes of logic and grammar. Since melancholy is one of the forms of sliding (back) into the pre-symbolic realm of semiotic drives, away from the paternal and towards the maternal, a form of denial of the original loss of the maternal body and thus of the signifier, i.e. the symbolic of language (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 33-68; see also M. A. Wells 78-81), it exacerbates the arbitrariness of linguistic signs beyond normative language, distancing signifiers from their meanings and drawing into the orbit of pre-symbolic motions (sobs, wails, moans) – what Sidney himself calls "wailing eloquence" (38.11).⁵¹ Identity disintegrates as language, the key mechanism of subject formation, yields to the primordial pressure of melancholy.

Indeed in the last sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil is as far as ever from a stable identity. On the contrary, he portrays his body and soul as unceremoniously snatched by personifications of his sufferings – sorrow and despair:

When sorrow (using mine owne fier's might)
 Melts downe his lead into my boyling brest,

⁵¹ On the recurring images of childhood and motherhood in Sidney, see McFaul 70-78.

Through that darke fornace to my hart opprest,
 There shines a joy from thee my only light;
 But soone as thought of thee breeds my delight,
 And my yong soule flutters to thee his nest,
 Most rude despaire my daily unbidden guest,
 Clips streight my wings, streight wraps me in his night,
 And makes me then bow downe my heade... (108.1-9)

Disjointed, physically and emotionally manipulated, self-mutilating (sorrow uses his “owne fier’s might”), emasculated by an act of symbolic castration (“Most rude despaire ... / Clips streight my wings”), possibly sub-human, wrapped in the darkness of ordinary night, Astrophil remains engulfed in the realm of melancholy that subverts identitarian stabilization. As elsewhere in the sequence, Astrophil’s self here is a site where various identifications continue to vie with one another. Like the cross-genre he attacks in his *Apologie*, Sidney’s own mongrel of a tragicomedy comes short of a dramatic resolution.

This final sonnet is doubly significant because it also epitomizes Sidney’s uneasy relationship with Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism. Among identities that *Astrophil and Stella* – a Petrarchan sonnet sequence – subverts perhaps none is more crucial than that of a Petrarchan poet. Even with regard to writing in general Sidney refuses to admit any kind of Platonic “poetical furie” that Walkington, for instance, assigns to melancholic’s (66^f). According to Astrophil, “Some do I heare of Poets’ furie tell, / But (God wot) wot not what they meane by it” (74.5-6).⁵² As we have seen in sonnet 23 with which I began, Astrophil in his paraphrase of pseudo-Aristotle curtails the statement and deliberately fails to mention vatic *furore* among interpretations of his melancholy, thus indeed confirming the waning in late Elizabethan England of “genial melancholy” that insisted upon a connection

⁵² Cf.: “I am never less a prey to melancholy,” writes Sidney in a letter to his tutor, “than when I am earnestly applying the feeble powers of my mind to some high and difficult subject” (*Correspondence of Sidney and Languet* 29).

between black bile and artistic inspiration.⁵³ These claims of course could be dismissed as an *occupatio*, but when Sidney, closer to the end of his sequence in sonnet 90 assures Stella that he lacks poetic ambition (“think not that I by verse seek fame, / . . . I wish not there should be / Graved in my Epitaph a Poet’s name” (90.1,7-8), he is very specific as to what form of poetic subjectivity he strives to avoid imitating: he does not want to frame his poetic nest “in Lawrell tree” (90.6) and thus follow Petrarch. This blunt rejection of Petrarchan identity, though perhaps not as radical as Surrey’s Petrarchan suicide,⁵⁴ hardly comes as a surprise, given that by this point in *Astrophil and Stella* Sidney’s anti-Petrarchan agenda is firmly established. A door to anti-Petrarchan resistance opens early – already in sonnet 1, with its melancholic split of the self into a Petrarchan poet and his critic; and in sonnet 2, where the figure of *gradatio* (“I saw and liked, I liked but loved not, / I loved, but straight did not what Love decreed: / At length to Love’s decrees, I forc’d, agreed, / Yet with repining at so partial lot” [2.4-8]) is called upon to express the subject’s refusal to accept the immediate power of love and Petrarchism. In Sonnet 15, one of the most comprehensive arguments against Petrarchism in the whole sequence, the speaker contrasts his poetic method to that of countless Petrarchan apes:

Ye that do Dictionarie’s methode bring
 Into your rimes, running in rattling rowes:
 You that poore *Petrarch*’s long deceased woes,
 With new-borne sighes and denisend wit do sing;
 You take wrong waies; those far-fet helps be such,
 As do bewray a want of inward tuch:
 And sure at length stolne goods doe come to light.
 But if (both for your love and skill) your name
 You seeke to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,

⁵³ Kitzes 27-31; Trevor 9; Schleiner, *Melancholy*.

⁵⁴ At the same time, at the moment of its posthumous publication *Astrophil and Stella* was also a book of the dead for its readers, much the same as Chaucer’s poetry and Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes* were for Sidney himself.

Stella behold, and then begin to endite. (15.5-14)

To imitate Petrarch, Sidney argues, is to “take wrong waies;” the clichéd poetics of Petrarchism leads a writer nowhere and has to be sacrificed on the road to a poetic originality that assists in expressing genuine emotion, such as his love for Stella. Tellingly, in this sonnet Sidney envisions Petrarchism as a kind of language, as a system of signs, iterable and impersonal, that anyone can discover in a “Dic-tionarie” of amorous poetry, such as Tottel’s *Miscellany* or Thomas Watson’s *Ἑκατομπαθία* – Elizabethan handbooks for love writing at which, as William Kennedy suggests, Sidney levels his attack in these lines (*Site* 177; see also Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney* 237-38). Moreover, the phrase “poore *Petrarch*’s long deceased woes” places emphasis not so much on the deadness of the Italian poet but rather on the lifelessness of his rhetoric. The language of Petrarchism is touted as alien, meaningless, and deceased; and the speaker refuses identification with Petrarch, opting instead for a form of Petrarchan asymbolia.

That is not what Sidney’s first readers seemed to think, however. Among numerous fictional titles Sidney received soon after his death, as though in compensation for an almost lifetime of waiting for a real one, was that of “our English *Petrarke*.” It was reportedly coined by Sir Walter Raleigh and repeated in 1591 by Sir John Harington in his translation of *Orlando Furioso* (L4^v). Soon after that Burton recruited Sidney’s lovesickness to illustrate his point about the connection between melancholy and artistic inspiration, and placed Sidney – probably against the Elizabethan poet’s will – right next to Petrarch:

But above all the other Symptomes of Lovers, this is not lightly to be overpassed, that likely of what condition soever, if once they bee in love, they turne to their ability, Rimers, Ballet-makers, and Poets. For as *Plutarch* saith, *They will bee witnesses and trumpeters of their Paramours good parts, bedecking them with verses and commendatory songs, as we doe statues with gold, that they may be remembered and admired of all...* ... as Nevisanus the Lawyer holds, *there never was any excellent Poet, that invented good fables, or made laudable verses, which was not in love him-*

selfe, had he not taken a quill from Cupids wings, he could never have written so amorously as he did... *Petrarchs Laura* made him so famous, *Astrophels Stella* [was the cause of his poems]. (3:190-93)⁵⁵

As several generations of modern critics have recognized, too, the poetry of *Astrophil and Stella* is indeed ambivalent, if not exactly hypocritical, vis-à-vis Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism: Sidney, chafing at his fellow Petrarchists, at the same time himself excels at conventional Petrarchan sonneteering.⁵⁶ Some of his poems uphold the norm; some contradict it. Considering how much emphasis Sidney places on the plot of his sequence, it is astounding that his Petrarchan subject, amid his claims of liberation and poetic individuality, not only fails to undergo any palpable change but in the final poem of the cycle (108), looking in his heart, discovers there “the conventional image of the Petrarchan lover, caught in an endless cycle of joy and despair” (E. Berry 137).⁵⁷ Sidney’s anti-Petrarchan project turns out to be a reiteration of a Petrarchan utterance. Indeed, if in Sonnet 6 the speaker mocks Petrarchan poets who write “Of hopes begot by feare, of wot not what desires: / Of force of heav’nly beames, infusing hellish paine: / Of living deaths, dere wounds, faire storms, and freeing fires” (2-4), in the concluding couplet to the last sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella* (“That in my woes for thee thou art my joy, / And in my joyes for thee my only annoy” [108.13-14]) he adopts the very oxymoronic strategy that seems to have been discarded as nonviable, not only in *Astrophil and*

⁵⁵ On Sidney’s posthumous importance as England’s Petrarch, see Alexander 199-208; Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 92-100.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Dubrow, *Echoes* 110; Ferry 137-40; Kalstone 106-07; Kennedy, *Site* 173. In an attempt to reconcile Sidney’s Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism, scholars have argued that it is only the abuses of Petrarchism that Sidney criticizes (Rudenstein 197-206), or that the sequence is in fact a parody of Petrarchism and therefore has to present both the Petrarchan conventions (to secure readerly awareness and recognition) and their antipodes (Young esp. 5-38).

⁵⁷ E. Berry’s is just the most recent formulation of the critical bewilderment at the gradual transformation in the final part of *Astrophil and Stella* of the speaker into a conventional Petrarchan lover, paralleled by Sidney’s conversion into a no less conventional Petrarchan sonneteer imprisoned in the clichéd language of Petrarchism. Cf., for example, Young (“the vital individuality of Astrophel of the first two sections [is] removed, and he is transformed into the Petrarchan lover who dominates the remainder of the sequence... [Sonnet 108] concludes the portrait of the conventional lover and the definition of the genre, ending the sequence with the acceptance of a frustration that can have no end” [81, 88]); McCoy (“[t]he final note [of the sequence] is one of complete submission to Petrarchan tradition” [*Rebellion* 109]); and Klein (“Astrophil remains in the prison house of Petrarchan language, worshipping Stella” [101]).

Stella but in *An Apologie* as well, where he exclaims that “truely many of such writings as come vnder the banner of vnresistible loue, if I were a Mistres, would neuer perswade mee they were in loue; so coldely they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather red Louers writings, and so caught vp certaine swelling phrases which hang together . . . then that in truth they feele those passions” (117).⁵⁸

I would like to argue that one could find an explanation of this contradiction in Sidney’s verse in the poetics of melancholy. While Astrophil’s claims of Petrarchan self-denial seem to contrast vividly with the very idea of creating an exquisite Petrarchan sequence, both are tightly interlocking elements in a complex system of post-Chaucerian melancholy writing that Sidney re-deploys in *Astrophil and Stella*. It is the insufficiency of Petrarchan subjectivity that orchestrates the thematic and formal intricacies of the sequence: looking for a new poetic identity, the speaker deconstructs the amorous ego offered to him by the discourse of Petrarchism, but – as we have already seen in Chaucer and Surrey – ends up reinscribing the same Petrarchan subjectivity that he sought to avoid in the first place. The lost, or rejected, Petrarchan self Astrophil presumably leaves behind is never discarded completely; this residual identification remains part of the self. As Judith Butler formulates the Freudian logic of melancholy, in it “there is no loss and, indeed, no negation. Melancholia refuses to acknowledge loss, and in this sense “reserves” its lost object as psychic effects” (*Psychic Life* 182). That is why Sidney’s phantasmatic melancholic wound – like Surrey’s – never heals. Simultaneously abandoned and retained, the Petrarchan identity is denied while exercising its influence over the subject’s writing.

In Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* a failed system of courtly signification is not rejected altogether, but is incorporated instead in his poetic sequence which, in a characteristically melancholic manner, makes it impossible to distinguish between Petrarchism and anti-Petrarchism. Unconvinced by Petrarchan conventions yet unable to abandon them, Sidney pursues a Chaucerian trajectory of

⁵⁸ Significantly, the phrase Sidney singles out as the object of his attack on the preposterousness of Petrarchan rhetoric is the same oxymoron that Surrey deconstructs in his verse.

writing, embracing both Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan sentiment. In fact, a complete melancholic alienation from poetic language threatens the subject with dissolution and disappearance. As Maria Prendergast has observed vis-à-vis Sidney's reluctance to assume the authority of originality in the sequence, the "tendency to shape an alternative poetics that covertly depends on the practices of the authorizing poet discloses Astrophil's underlying concern that, by identifying himself with a radical poetics of originality, he may drift progressively into a solipsistic space which ultimately alienates him from any coherent, unified conception of self" (69). *Astrophil and Stella* exposes the limitations of Petrarchan discourse, yet the very sustainability of its subject-position depends on the preservation of this rejected language embedded, if in a disguised, surreptitious form, within the poetic utterance. Sidney's Petrarchan sequence is melancholic in the sense that its fragmentation, dispersal, and instability form the necessary conditions for its functioning as a viable if struggling discourse, as does its denial of and inextricability from its ordinary language, Petrarchism, which makes it hostile to and yet ultimately dependent upon its own discursive history.

* * *

Immediately after Sir Philip Sidney's tragic death in 1586 near Zutphen in the Netherlands, from an all too literal (and yet erotically charged) musket wound in the left thigh, the process of creating the Sidney legend began.⁵⁹ That the 1591 publication of *Astrophil and Stella* inaugurated a fashion for Petrarchan sonnet sequences is beyond doubt, and thus the proud title of the preeminent Petrarchan poet of Renaissance England is Sidney's by right. Moreover, his achievements as a Petrarchan poet are his principal legacy that ensured his role in English literary history, notwithstanding what Sidney himself may have thought of his own poetry ("My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys" [18.9]). What is less obvious, however, as a genealogical reading such as mine suggests, is whether his model of reflexive Petrarchism (one that at the same time criticizes the language of courtly poetry and clings to it) – the invention of which in the history of English poetry is

⁵⁹ On mythologizing the life (and death) of Sidney, including his literary works, see the essays in Van Dorsten, Baker-Smith, and Kinney; Falco 1-123; Klein 13-38, 103-35, 171-87; Woudhuysen.

ascribed to Sidney⁶⁰ – does not have vernacular precedents. Or, to put it in different terms, the argument that the persistent dispersal of the self in *Astrophil and Stella* is the product of Sidney’s original dialogue with Petrarch or other discourses of early modern culture such as Protestantism appears more complicated if Sidney’s literary genealogy – which he himself imagines as running from Chaucer through Surrey – is taken into account.

It is not only in his interest in constructing an elaborate narrative that Sidney is a Chaucerian as much as he is a Petrarchist. Rather, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the foregoing pages, the shattered subjectivity Sidney espouses in *Astrophil and Stella* – torn between loving and writing and constantly in pursuit of a chronically elusive stability – while unquestionably echoing the fractures inherent within the poetic self that Petrarchism provided to its practitioners all across early modern Europe, is already inscribed in the English vernacular by poets like Chaucer and Surrey – poets, I should add, with whom Sidney (if his own words bear any weight with us) apparently felt a special bond. Taken on its own, Sidney’s sonnet sequence is a daring project of an early modern genius that, by his own praxis of anti-Petrarchan writing, opens new ways for articulating the self and thus looks into the future rather than assumes a place in a poetic tradition already in existence. If, however, instead of disinheriting Sidney in poetic terms and thus reenacting some of the most unpleasant instances of his biography, we replace autonomy with lineage (a gesture that Sidney would have undoubtedly applauded) and open *Astrophil and Stella* to a dialogue with earlier texts, the prominent role that melancholic poetics plays in its text becomes apparent. This poetics determines that much as Sidney’s sequence may insist upon its independence of Petrarchism, it still cannot operate outside of the territory regulated by Petrarchan discourse without running the risk of total dissolution in the ocean of anti-Petrarchan asymbolia, both as a literary ambition and an identity structure. In much the

⁶⁰ This view is quite widespread, but one of its most concise formulations can be found in Heninger (“We must recognize and even respect the model to which Sidney points... while at the same time with Sidney we criticize and reject it. These conflicting demands are upon the reader are new to the sonnet tradition” [83]). See also Kalstone 180-81, who is adamant that Chaucer’s *Troilus* is no match for Sidney’s self-conscious style; and Ferry 119-169, esp. 128. M. Prendergast, from a different perspective, also awards to *Astrophil and Stella* the originary status in the history of English “anxiety of originality” (69).

same way, *Astrophil and Stella* is a project which vigorously denies and resists its Chaucerian history and yet adopts the same pattern of poetic subjectivity that Chaucer shapes in the *Book of the Duchess* and Tottel's Surrey revives in his *Songes and Sonettes*. Writing after Chaucer turns out to be writing about Chaucer – about Chaucer as an irretrievable, lost poetic object which can never be fully articulated but which continues to lurk in the texts of later love poets. The Sidneian “I” does not simply translate the Petrarchan self into English but rather, projecting it onto a vernacular form, joins a process of symbolic accretion that inevitably adds an historical – even nostalgic – dimension to its articulations of subjectivity. Simultaneously forgetting and remembering Chaucer, *Astrophil and Stella*, in its frenzied quest for poetic originality, displays the key principle of the poetics of melancholy.

Chapter Three
Captive Voices of Desire:
The Casket Sonnets and the Poetics of Monarchical
Prison Writing

The principal object of this chapter is the casket sonnets, a short Petrarchan lyric sequence attributed in its first print publication in 1571 to Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots. Located at an intersection of Petrarchan desire and royal power, in recent years the sonnets have generated a growing interest among English Renaissance scholars, inviting historicist and feminist readings which examine the poems in the contexts of early modern gender (Burke); vitriolic factional politics and religious reform of early modern Scotland (Dunnigan 15-45); Renaissance monarchical writing and the theory of French absolutism (Herman, *Royal Poetrie* 75-98); and Petrarchan women poets' compromised participation in an emerging print culture in early modern Britain (R. Smith 46-55). My goal in the pages that follow, however, is to transcend the interpretive frame of early modern culture and politics and to investigate medieval vernacular genealogies of the ways Mary Stewart's subjectivity is constructed in the casket sonnets and the texts that surround them. Although the Petrarchan provenance of these poems is undoubtedly crucial for the understanding of their poetic subject,¹ there are other discursive forces at play. By considering Mary's poetry in the context of its publication and circulation history, particularly through the lens of her imprisonment, I argue that the complex textual construction surrounding her voice is part of a rich tradition in English cultural imagination that percolates through a wide range of discourses and offers new interpretive possibilities for reading the cas-

¹ As Lisa Hopkins writes, "As first "reine-dauphine" and later queen of France, [Mary Stuart] became thoroughly steeped in French court culture, and it is against this background, and in particular the tuition she received from Ronsard and the other members of the Pléiade, that her use and development of poetic voice must be understood" (72; also 81-85).

ket sonnets themselves and their numerous paratexts. On the one hand, I suggest, Mary's poetry and its various contexts look back towards medieval courtly writing, specifically, the prison love poems of James I Stewart and Charles d'Orléans; whereas on the other hand the master trope of the imprisoned sovereign functions as a pivotal feature of the pre-modern English political imaginary. The casket sonnets as they were printed in early modern England, I contend, rewrite from a Petrarchan perspective the poetic voices of incarcerated princes constructed by the medieval poems, with their questions of relationships between princes and subjects, of passion and rule, and of the limits of political and poetic authority. They also reactivate the multifarious resources of political and courtly rhetoric (found, for example, in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and the political treatises of Sir John Fortescue and George Buchanan) that underwrites articulations of monarchical erotic and political desires in Anglo-Scots culture from the early fifteenth to the early seventeenth century.

The Casket Sonnets: Text, Context, Paratext, Pretext

The casket sonnet sequence comprises twelve Petrarchan poems in French, eleven sonnets and a six-line envoy, accompanied by crude albeit rather accurate English translations, that vocalize a female speaker's desire for her male beloved and her sexual and poetic rivalry with another woman identifiable as the beloved's wife. They were printed in late 1571 (or possibly early 1572) in a pamphlet called *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes, touchand the murder of her Husband, and hir Conspiracie, Adulterie, and pretensit Marriage with the Erle Bothwell. And ane defence of trew Lordis, maintaineris of the Kingis graces actioun and authoritie. Translatit out of the latine, quhilk was written by G.B.* Although the book's title page bore neither place nor date of printing, and the author's name was masked behind the initials "G.B.," it is doubtful that the politics behind the pamphlet or the names of those who had a hand in bringing it out in print were much of a

mystery to early modern English readers. It was in all probability printed in London,² and the “G.B.” that appears on the title page was George Buchanan (1506-1582), a Protestant Scots writer and politician,³ whose Latin prose treatise *Detectio* formed the first part of the English *Detectiovn*.

Buchanan’s *Detectio* (together with his dialogue on political theory *De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus* and *Rerum Scotiarum Historia*) was written and circulated to justify the actions of Scottish Protestant lords who had rebelled against their Catholic queen Mary Stewart and forced her to abdicate in 1567. The English book, however, while adopting Buchanan’s Latin oration, had its own political agenda distinct from that of the Scottish Protestants who had to deal with a wide backlash against their anti-monarchical revolt. In 1571 when the pamphlet appeared in print, Mary Stewart was in England, in “protective custody” of Elizabeth.⁴ As students of early modern British history will recall, Mary Stewart, the daughter of and heir to James V Stewart of Scotland, was also a claimant to the throne of England (Mary’s grandmother was a sister of Henry VIII married to James IV of Scotland). Married to the Dauphin Francois (despite Henry VIII’s attempts, including military expeditions, to woo her for the future Edward VI), she spent her early years at the French court, embracing the language and culture of the Catholic realm. After the dauphin’s sudden death in 1561 she returned as Catholic queen to Scotland, a country that had established Protestantism as its official religion the previous year. There in 1565, notwithstanding a strong opposition from both the Scottish nobility and English crown, she married Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, the son of the Earl of Lennox. As a result of this marriage, a son was born in 1566, the future James VI/I. The union soon collapsed, however. Darnley, who had been growing estranged from Mary and increasingly unhappy with the degree of royal power she was willing to grant him, allowed himself to be involved in a plot against the preg-

² The first London edition, printed by John Day, was followed in 1572 by Robert Lekprevik’s Edinburgh impression and, further, by a French edition either in London or La Rochelle. For the publication history of *Ane Detectiovn*, see McFarlane 348-50; Staines 27-39. Both the French and English texts are transcribed in Herman, *Reading Monarchs Writing* 243-54. I cite the casket sonnets from the 1571 edition of the *Detectiovn* (Rij^v-Siⁱ).

³ On Buchanan’s life and works, see Ford; McFarlane.

⁴ The following brief account of Mary’s last years in Scotland and her early years in England is based on a number of studies, including Doran, *Mary Queen of Scots*; Fraser; Guy; Warnicke, *Mary*; Wormald.

nant Mary. Although he soon changed sides and reconciled with the queen, betraying his co-conspirators, it did not save him from being assassinated in 1567. During this prolonged period of crisis, Mary – probably even before she was a widow – had become attracted to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, who was rumoured to have played a more than episodic role in Darnley’s death. Desiring to place the queen under his control, however, in the same year Bothwell abducted Mary and brought her to Dunbar Castle, where he presumably raped her. She married him shortly after, which spelled the beginning of her end as Scots monarch. A union with her husband’s suspected murderer rendered Mary just as guilty in the eyes of many, including her political enemies, who did not fail to capitalize on this opportunity. A broad coalition against Mary and Bothwell was formed, and though military success was dubious for both sides, Bothwell fled the country and Mary was imprisoned in the island fortress of Loch Leven, and shortly afterwards forced to abdicate in favour of James. Buchanan’s Latin *Detectio*, a catalogue of Mary’s alleged crimes (sexual intemperance, adultery, murder conspiracy), sought to justify the deposition.

In 1568 Mary managed to escape from her prison and, seeking asylum after an unsuccessful attempt to raise another army, fled across the Solway Firth to England. In England, however, the expatriate queen quickly found herself incarcerated again.⁵ Instead of receiving military aid which would see her restored to the Scottish throne, as she had hoped, Mary was almost immediately placed in custody in Carlisle Castle, from where she was soon transferred to Bolton Castle, and later to Tutbury, Wingfield and Chatsworth (1569), and finally the heavily fortified Sheffield Castle (1570), where she would be kept for over a decade. Moved from one place of imprisonment to another, Mary would spend the next eighteen years in captivity in England, until her execution in 1587. Historians differ on the question of how restrictive her imprisonment was: officially a guest of the queen, she was permitted visitations and communications, but both were at least partly controlled. Apparently, the level of security fluctuated, depending on the political climate. However, even though Elizabeth may have felt uneasy about applying the term “prisoner” to the exiled Scots queen (Doran, *Mary*

⁵ On Mary’s imprisonment, see Guy 424-45; Holmes; Hopkins 55-66.

Queen of Scots 138), and the conditions of Mary's custody were infinitely removed from the Foucauldian panopticon, the royal prisoner did not have full control over her person. As Mary herself described her state in one of the letters, she was an "arrestee" in England, while one of her guardians referred to himself as her "gaoler" (qtd. in Holmes 207).

Mary's presence in England created a series of tensions for the Elizabethan regime. To begin with, the very fact of her imprisonment was a political scandal: Mary was a sovereign monarch, the queen of France and Scotland and, in addition, a pretender to the English throne; her deposition in Scotland was an action Elizabeth did not condone. At the same time, Mary's Catholicism made her an unwelcome guest in a country already torn by religious conflict, so she could not be allowed freedom of movement within Protestant England, nor was it wise to grant her permission to travel to France or Spain. Fears of Catholic conspiracies against Elizabeth were not unreasonable in the late 1560s and early 1570s, as the Norfolk plot of 1569 and Rodolfi plot of 1571 showed. Then, there was the unfinished business with the north: Elizabeth herself was unwilling to believe rumours of Mary's adultery and complicity in the murder of her husband, yet she agreed to mediate between the Scots and the ousted queen, so that eventually Mary could return to Scotland in some official capacity. To that end a series of inquiries was set up between 1568 and 1572 to ascertain Mary's role in Darnley's death, which solidified the image of Mary as an incarcerated suspect of crime.

It should also be taken into account, however, that Elizabeth and her councilors, first of all, William Cecil, evidently had quite different objectives in resolving the Scottish queen affair: whereas the queen would have rather seen Mary return to Scotland as a legitimate, if limited, ruler, Cecil was more concerned with undermining her claims to the English throne and thus neutralizing the Catholic threat to England's Protestant settlement. This meant both Mary's continued incarceration and an aggressive ideological campaign, of which *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* was a crucial piece. Cecil made the best use of the available materials to represent Mary Stewart as an unsuitable candidate to rule England, mixing criminal accusations with sexual gossip. Buchanan's *Detectio* (in a translation by Thomas Wilson) was the centerpiece of Cecil's smear artillery, but the Eng-

lish *Detectiovn* also incorporated a lengthy defense of their actions on behalf of the Scottish lords (so called *Actio*) and what has since become known as the “casket letters” – a body of several letters and poems, presumably in Mary’s own hand, discovered in a silver casket (hence the name) by Protestant lords in Scotland and originally made available in transcription to the 1568 York commission as part of the incriminating evidence against Mary introduced to sustain the charges of adultery and murder.⁶ In *Ane Detectiovn* the letters and love sonnets were advertised as authentic writings of the unfortunate queen, as “Certaine French Sonnettes writtin by ye Quene of Scottes to Bothwell befor hir Mariage with him, and (as it is sayd) quile hir husband lyuit, but certainly befor his diuorce from hys wife as the wordes tham selues shew, befor quhom she here preferreth her selfe in deseruing to be beloued of Bothwell” (Qiiij^r). Combined with Buchanan’s narrative and other commentaries characterizing Mary as sexually intemperate and criminally liable, they were an example of anti-Marian propaganda originating in both English and Scottish quarters. The language of the book was an imperfect stylized Anglo-Scots, so that John D. Staines, for example, describes the pamphlet as “a collaboration” between Cecil and Buchanan, “an elaborate fraud designed to hide the English government’s role in the propaganda campaign” (27, 37); while J. E. Phillips argues that it was “completely a product, in its published form, of English activities to discredit Mary without violating Elizabeth’s official attitude of benevolent neutrality toward her reluctant guest” (61, also 61-71). Glossed with the pejoratively inflected quasi-biographical interpretations of *Ane Detectiovn*, in the eyes of many these letters and poems offered proof of Mary’s guilt.

Two details in the tangled web of the casket sonnets are of particular interest here. First, despite the riot of contentious arguments both for and against Mary Stewart’s authorship of the casket

⁶ This is what *Ane Detectiovn* has to say about the discovery: “in the castel of Edenburgh there was left by the Erle Bothwell befor his fleing away, and was sent for by one George Daglish his seruant, quho was taken by the Erle Moreton, one small gilt cofer nat fully ane fwte lang, beyng garnishit in sondry places with the Romaine letter *F* vnder ane kyngis crowne, quairin were certaine letters and writynges well knawin, and by othes to be affirmit, to haue been written with the queen of Scottes awne hand to the Erle Bothwell” (Oij^r).

sonnets,⁷ we cannot ignore the fact that the text of *Ane Detectiovn* promotes the sonnets as the work of Mary Stewart. Even if those letters and sonnets were forgeries (and both the Scottish and English politicians had sufficient motive to fabricate them), or if they were altered in a major way to suit the political needs of those desiring to compromise Mary, the pamphlet containing the casket sonnets still constructs (and construes) their poetic voice as unequivocally belonging to a monarch and urges the public to read them as originally inscribed in Mary's "awen hand." And that brings us to our second point: around the time the casket letters and sonnets saw the light of day, first as a body of evidence presented by the Scots to the York commission in 1568 and then as a public printed text in 1571, Mary Stewart was imprisoned in England. Throughout the 1570s, the voice that could be heard from the casket sonnets was that of an incarcerated queen.

Monarchy and imprisonment, I would argue, are the two most powerful elements that construct Mary Stewart's textual subjectivity. Both, however, are produced through a combination of text, commentary, and the historical conditions of publication and circulation – in other words, paratextually. The notion of paratext found its first sustained articulation in Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests*, where he defines it as a work's "title, subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; marginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations; blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic," which "provide the text with a (variable) setting and sometimes commentary, official or not" (3). In *Paratexts*, Genette expands the notion of paratext to include historical context and biographical information ("every context serves as a paratext" [8]), although his focus nonetheless remains linguistic as well as tightly bound with authorial intention ("something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it" [9]). Recent work of early modern critics, however, while drawing on Genette's ideas, has stressed the importance of non-linguistic and non-authorial elements

⁷ Fraser questions their authenticity (463-77), as does Guy (384-423), whereas Wormald leans towards believing them to be genuine (176-78). Warnicke is skeptical but does not dismiss the possibility that the letters and poems were not forgeries (*Mary Queen of Scots* 177-77). See also Doran, *Mary Queen of Scots* 130-34; R. Smith 40-43.

of the text.⁸ From this perspective, the commentaries of the authors of *Ane Detectioun* and the circumstances of Mary's deposition and incarceration are crucial for our interpretation of Mary's textual identity. Besides, the voice of a monarch, we must remember, is never fully his or her own. As Helen Hackett writes, images of monarchy are placed between "their deliberate construction and promotion by central government authority, and their creation by a public projecting their own desires and anxieties" (6).⁹ The poetic of voice of a sovereign never enjoys full agency but is unavoidably in part constructed by the subjects; and as Mary's casket sonnets demonstrate, paratextual mechanisms are powerful tools of such double-edged articulation of identity. Her poetic self emerges out of the sonnets as much as it does out of the imaginative complex of surrounding contexts and paratexts, among which her imprisonment plays a critical role. While the casket sonnets were not written in prison, their textual agency, I hope to demonstrate, yields itself to a reading in terms similar to prison writing.

It is not that scholars have failed to notice the significance of incarceration for the study of Mary Stewart. Lisa Hopkins, for one, discusses Mary's incarceration at length (58-71), but she does not consider Mary's own writings in the context of her imprisonment, focusing on the writings *about* Mary's captivity. She argues instead that "imprisonment becomes not merely an incidental metaphor in the writing of Renaissance queens but an emblem of its fundamental condition" (56). There is more to the case of Mary Stewart's poetry as prison writing, however. As I shall demonstrate, as a metaphor Mary's imprisonment is far from "incidental" in a broader sense than Hopkins's gender-inflected formulation implies, for its significance goes to the very theoretical foundations of English and Scottish monarchy. By facilitating a dialogue between Mary's love poetry and her incarceration, I thus depart both from recent readings of the sonnets that focus on the emergence of Mary's poetic identity out of an illicit love affair between her and Bothwell, what Rosalind Smith has described as "a project of local self-interest" (51) on the one hand; and from the narrow definition of prison writing as "works that derive their character and impact from their origins in prison" (Sherman and Sheils, Pref-

⁸ See essays in Smith and Wilson, *Renaissance Paratexts*.

⁹ This is the underlying thesis of Kevin Sharpe's monumental *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*.

ace 128). I am interested in unweaving the figurative threads of representation of Mary's imprisonment in *Ane Detectioun* and discovering medieval precedents for the figure of an imprisoned monarch, as well as in connecting it with broader cultural and political issues.¹⁰

As a text that can be construed as an instance of monarchical prison writing, then, the casket sonnets call for a somewhat different hermeneutic paradigm than has been hitherto employed. A series of love poems spoken in the voice of an incarcerated sovereign, the sonnets construct a literary subject analogous to the one inscribed in the English literary imaginary by two fifteenth-century poetic texts, *The Kingis Quair* attributed to Scots king James I Stewart (1394-1437)¹¹ and a sequence of English lyrics associated with French duke Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465).¹²

The Kingis Quair (the King's book, or poem), written sometime between 1424 and 1437, is a relatively short (1,379 lines) first-person allegorical dream-vision narrative. It opens with the speaker reading the *Consolation of Philosophy* and reflecting on his own past misfortunes, which he decides to write down in a book. He recounts a sea passage, capture and imprisonment and recalls seeing, through his cell window, a beautiful lady in the garden and falling in love with her. He then sleeps and in his dream appears before two goddesses, Venus and Minerva, who promise him earthly happiness if he agrees to abide by the laws of moral love. He then encounters Fortuna who lifts him high upon her wheel, but the speaker is abruptly awakened to reality as his dream vision ends. As the goddesses promised, the lover soon finds bliss with the lady from the garden and is granted release. A

¹⁰ By insisting upon the rhetorical and imaginative aspects of Mary's imprisonment, as well as on its connections with previous tradition of royal prison writing, I question the recent tendency among critics to emphasize the novelty of early modern prison experience on the one hand, and to focus on the minute particulars of carceral practices and their representations, in contrast to the generality of the vocabulary of imprisonment. See, for example, other essays in Sherman and Sheils, *Prison Writings*, esp. Freeman. At the same time, Rivka Zim's essay in the same volume argues that every prison writer's individual experience must be considered against the authority of literary and historical precedents, for such accounts often extend beyond the narrowly defined "prison writing."

¹¹ All quotations from the poem are taken from James I of Scotland, *Kingis Quair*.

¹² Charles' English cycle lacks a title. The early twentieth-century edition of Steele and Day used the descriptive title *The English Poems of Charles of Orléans. Fortunes Stabilnes* is a recent suggestion by Arn (Introduction 9-11), which has been questioned (Spearing, *Subjectivity* 226-27; Summers 93). Spearing opts for the more neutral *Duke's Book*, which has the advantage that it invokes parallels with the *Kingis Quair*. All references are to Charles d'Orléans, *Fortunes Stabilnes* by line number.

formulaic envoy sends the book into the world and recommends it to his poetic precursors, Chaucer and Gower.

The author of the poem is believed to be James I Stewart who was literally held in captivity in England for seventeen years.¹³ The sole heir to the Scottish throne, in 1406 young James was secretly dispatched to France for reasons of safety, but his ship was captured by pirates, with the Scottish prince becoming a prisoner of Henry IV and later Henry V. The death of his father, Robert III of Scotland, in the same year made James *de facto* Scottish king, although he would not be officially crowned until after his release in 1424. As was frequently the case with prisoners of elevated rank, James' incarceration did not confine him to a prison cell. He did spend some time in the Tower in 1406-07 and 1413-16, but he also traveled with Henry V to France on military and diplomatic missions and was present at the English king's wedding to Catherine of Valois and her subsequent coronation. Following Henry V's death, James' release became a political exigency for the English who, preoccupied with the French wars and domestic strife, sought to have an ally on the Scottish throne. (James was captured at the age of twelve and released at thirty, so he was largely educated as an Englishman and even knighted in 1421). To strengthen the ties between the two kingdoms, before his departure for Scotland James was married to Joan Beaufort, an English noblewoman. Upon his return to Scotland, James ruled the country for thirteen years, until his brutal murder in 1437.

Charles d'Orléans's book of love poems is a significantly longer, although probably unfinished, poetic sequence (approx. 6500 lines), most likely composed during Charles' imprisonment in England.¹⁴ A prince of the house of Valois (his father was a brother of King Charles VI), before the age of sixteen Charles had lost both his parents and his first wife and had inherited the title of the Duke of Orléans, with all the political perils and responsibilities that blood ties with the royal house of France entailed in the early fifteenth century. Among those was involvement in the Hundred Years War, and there Charles's fortunes were fickle. Captured at Agincourt in 1415 at the age of twenty-

¹³ For biographical information about James I, see Balfour-Melville; Brown.

¹⁴ On Charles' biography, see Arn, Introduction 12-27; Fein 13-22; McLeod; on his imprisonment, J. Fox 10-26.

one, the French prince was taken to England where he would spend in captivity, moved from castle to castle, twenty-five years until his release in 1440. While in England, like James I Stewart, Charles had to alternate spells of close surveillance and isolation with periods of relative freedom and political and social activity. For the most part, he spent his time as a “guest” of various noblemen, among whom he formed a particular attachment with Richard de la Pole, the Earl of Suffolk (married to Alice Chaucer), in whose household he remained from 1432 to 1436. Most of his hosts spoke French, but evidently Charles had also mastered English by the time of his release, although the library he assembled during his years in England contained predominantly French and Latin texts. Years of isolation and idleness nurtured Charles’ literary talent. He was known in France as an accomplished poet before (and after) his imprisonment, and his verse in French is an established part of the late-medieval French literary canon (see Fein; J. Fox). Yet his English poetry only recently came onto the radar of students of pre-modern English literature.¹⁵ The bulk of Charles’ English writings are preserved in the Harley manuscript. Charles himself probably commissioned the book, most likely shortly before his release, as the English copy was left unfinished, together with a manuscript of his French verse which he carried with him to France (Arn, “Two Manuscripts”). Roughly half of the English poems have equivalents in Charles’ personal French manuscript and can loosely be termed translations, or self-translations (Crane; Coldiron 14-38), while the other half consists of original verse in English.

The English book is a loosely structured collection of lyrics in several genres, most prominently ballads and roundels, held together by longer narrative fragments. In the opening section the speaker enters the service of the gods of love Cupid and Venus who retain the lover’s heart as a token of loyalty, despite the former’s protestations. That triggers a series of 74 courtly ballads, in which the lover tries to woo the lady and complains of his unrequited love; eventually, a sort of alliance formed between the lover and his lady, but the progress of their love is soon interrupted by the news of his beloved’s sickness and then death, so the last 17 ballads in this series become poems of sophisticated

¹⁵ Most critics agree that Charles is the author of the cycle (Arn, Introduction 32-77), although Calin argues that the work is a translation of Charles’s poems by an English nobleman (“Real Charles”).

grief. Inconsolable, the speaker (at this point the book shifts from lyric to narrative again) has a dream in which Age advises him against continuing his service to Love; upon awakening, Charles prepares a petition to Cupid asking for a release and, having obtained permission, receives his heart back and departs to the Castle of No Care, vowing never to love again. Three more ballads (82-84) celebrate his retirement from the service of love, followed by a miscellaneous collection of roundels that do not adhere to any clear narrative development but pursue instead several courtly themes. In the last narrative piece, the protagonist is asked to compose a ballad for a friend; the process of writing turns into a dream vision, in which the lover encounters Venus. Having rediscovered his ability to love, the speaker composes a second series of ballads addressed to his new beloved whom he meets shortly after waking. The last poem of the book bids farewell to the reader, although it is unclear whether the cycle has indeed reached a conclusion.

Both fifteenth-century texts have a long history of being bracketed together in critical discourse under the rubrics of Chaucerian, Boethian, oneiric, and prison writing.¹⁶ As I would like to suggest, however, the lyric subjects of these two poems also bear similarities with the voice of the casket sonnets. It is beyond doubt that there are tremendous formal and ideological differences between the three texts that arise out of very different cultural, political, personal, and literary circumstances. One can, nonetheless, discern a number of intriguing parallels between the texts. Not only are the poems of James, Charles, and Mary “erotic pseudo-autobiographies”¹⁷ written in the first person and preoccupied predominantly with the subjective inner world, but in all three the reader finds monarchs facing various forms of opposition – political, erotic, verbal, national – to their subjectivity. Each text treats these scenarios of selfhood differently, yet their reiterations suggest the importance they hold for the pre-modern English literary and political imaginary.

In fact, my goal in the following pages is not merely to describe similarities between the ways the three texts articulate their subjectivity, although recurring patterns of identity do suggest the pres-

¹⁶ See, for example, Boffey, “Chaucerian Prisoners;” Marks; Simpson, *Reform* 185-87; Spearing, “Dreams;” Summers 60-107.

¹⁷ The term is suggested by Spearing (“Dreams” 124).

ence of such an enduring form of textual selfhood as “incarcerated sovereign” in English literature and culture from the early fifteenth to the early seventeenth century. What I also seek to achieve is to uncover the implications of these poetic figures to the theory of monarchy from Fortescue to James I. Of course uncertainties of dating and attribution make any argumentation along these lines highly speculative. Nonetheless, I read all three poems in the context of English (and in some degree Scottish) literary and political history, because despite their national hybridity they all in one degree or another display connections with pre-modern English culture, most notably through their linguistic affiliation.¹⁸ Finally, in arguing for the relevance of the fifteenth century literary and political imaginary for our understanding of Elizabethan and Jacobean writings, I seek to develop further a claim Paul Strohm has recently made in *Politique*, that the origins of the Tudor and Stuart languages of political philosophy and statecraft – of the key political terminology of the early modern period – can be located in the fifteenth century of English history and literature.

¹⁸ Whatever language James spoke when he was captured at the age of twelve, for the next eighteen years he had to interact predominantly in the language of his hosts. His education was dominated by English culture, and the language of his poem is an example of the southern English dialect, although at the same time it is “what one would expect of a man who had been exposed to English speech and English writing over a long period, but who nevertheless had never lost touch with the language of his own country” (Kratzmann 36). Charles, known as an accomplished poet in France, learnt not only to translate his own poems but to write original verse in English. As Edward Hall claimed in his *Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, the duke of Orléans “was deliuered out of Englande into France at that tyme, . . . speakyng better Englishe then Frenche” (cx1); and Rene d’Anjou, Charles’s friend and frequent guest after the latter’s release, states in his *Livre du Cueur d’Amours espris* that Charles’s knowledge of the English language allowed him to make the acquaintance with a certain lady with whom he fell in love (Fein 85). For the use of the term “hybridity” in connection with the poems of James I and Charles, see Bowers 291; Crane 169; also Butterfield 304-07. Likewise, Mary’s “French Sonnettes” are forcibly Anglicized (or Anglo-Scotticized) by the author of *Ane Detectiovn*; they are “a ‘ghostly’ text, caught on the threshold of two versions” (Dunnigan 16).

Also, by concluding with a series of exclamations that identify Mary as a foreign body dangerous to England’s political health, *Ane Detectiovn* positions itself within the domain of English politics: “Now iudge Englischmen if it be gud to change Quenis. / O vniting confounding. / Quhen rude Scotland hes vomited vp ane poison, must fine England lick it vp for a restorative? / O vile indignitie. / Quhile your Quenis enemy liueth, hir dangir continueth” (Yijj^r). I thus seek to complement Herman’s reading of the poems in *Royal Poetrie* (52-98) through the prism of the theory of French absolutism.

“Martir ... and Prisonere:” The Poetics and Politics of Royal

Imprisonment in Pre-Modern England

Though direct identification of the speaker as a person of royal rank in the poems ascribed to James I, Charles of Orléans, and Mary Stewart often relies on contentious extra- and paratextual evidence, the texts themselves do deploy certain strategies that present their speakers as rulers. The most conspicuous case is Charles: the opening lines of the English manuscript imitate a legal patent letter made in the name of “the duk that folkis calle / Of Orlyauunce” (5-6), a name immediately claimed by the speaker (“when in myn hond was tan me this patent / I seide...” [56-57]); and the petition to relieve him of Cupid’s service is signed by “the trewe Charlis, Duk of Orlyauunce” (3044; see also 2720; 4788). There are other personal and biographical references scattered throughout the text (e.g. 714-15; 863-65; 1044-47), although critics (Spearing, *Subjectivity* 226, Summers 95) warn us that the autobiographical element is but a textual effect in Charles’s poetry. Calin (“Real Charles” 77) is right to question the validity of all these half-surreptitious references to Charles’s name as evidence of his authorship, but it does not change the fact that the persona of the cycle is textually constructed as a royal prisoner whose historical identity – but not literary royal blood – remains an issue.

The voice in the *Kingis Quair* is somewhat more elusive. The Selden manuscript (preserving the unique copy of the poem) contains a colophon that reads, “Explicit etc. etc. Quod Iacobus primus scotorum rex Illustrissimus,” a claim reiterated by a sixteenth-century rubric in the manuscript, “heirefter followis the quair Maid be King Iames of Scotland the first callit the Kingis Quair and Maid quen his *Maiestie* wes in Inland” (qtd. in James I, *Kingis Quair* xix; see also Fradenburg, “Scottish Chaucer” 171-72). Annals of Scots history contain references to James I as poet-king: Walter Bower in his *Scotichronicon* (1440-47) describes the king as “another Orpheus” and claims that “he applied himself with eagerness sometimes to the art of literary composition and writing” (305, 309), whereas John Mair’s 1521 *History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland Compiled from the Ancient Authorities* mentions James’ “ingenious little book about the Queen [written] while

he was yet in captivity and before his marriage” (366). In the words of Louise O. Fradenburg, “whether or not [James] wrote the *Quair* – or any other poem for that matter – some important fifteenth-century writers and readers wished to believe that he did; and that wish is itself a historical significance” (“Scottish Chaucer” 171). Those who read the poem in the manuscript could not help but react to such paratextual claims, imagining the possibility of the poem’s persona being that of the historical James. Besides, the fictional adventures that befall the protagonist of the poem – the speaker’s youth, his sea voyage away from his native land abruptly interrupted by his enemies, his imprisonment and then liberation (esp. 134-210, 1261-67) – echo emphatically the events of James’s own life recapitulated above: his youthful voyage to France, captivity, incarceration, and release. As Joanna Martin has recently noted, “[i]f the poem was not composed by James, it is evident that its author intended the reader to recognize the prince’s trials in the events described” (21).¹⁹

Similarly, as we have seen, *Ane Detectioun* identifies the speaker of the casket sonnets as the exiled Scots monarch paratextually (“Certaine French Sonnettes writtin by ye Quene of Scottes to Bothwell ...”), but the poems themselves are less ambiguous than their medieval counter-parts in bestowing upon their persona attributes of royal power. In the second sonnet the speaker confesses that she has surrendered to her beloved almost everything that constitutes a royal identity:

Into his handis and in his full power,
I put my sonne, my honour, and my lyif,
My contry, my subiects, my soul al subdewit
To him.

(Rijj^r; emphasis added)

¹⁹ Less directly, Spearing argues that the royal rank of the speaker can be inferred from the fact that the speaker not only writes about courtly love, but (unlike, for instance, Chaucer) has first-hand experience of it in the course of the poem (“Dreams” 129). Sally Mapstone finds another “semi-concealed” reference to the protagonist’s kingship in the image of Fortune’s wheel in the last part of the poem, arguing that in medieval depictions of this motif the king is ubiquitously present, and the only candidate for that role in the *Kingis Quair* is the speaker (“Kingship” 58-59). For Joanna Martin (22-23), the speaker’s reading of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* suggests his interest in the *de casibus* genre and, therefore, subtly signals his status.

Whoever composed these lines clearly intended the readers to appreciate the royal status of the speaker. As Sarah Dunnigan writes, “[e]ven without the insistent identificatory manuscript gloss, the identification of a sovereign, or political self... is difficult to resist at certain textual moments... This particular language of desire threaded through the sonnets, enacts a ‘sovereign love’” (29).

In all three cases, then, the texts attribute their poetic voice to royal subjects. Such attention to the speakers’ princely identity might appear unwarranted, but much of what can be argued about the poems that assume the personas of James, Charles, and Mary ensues primarily from their identification as persons of royal rank. It is their monarchical status persistently coming under pressure from various quarters that is central to the poems, with their subjectivities arising out of clashes with others. As Peter Herman astutely remarks, “monarchic verse does not represent the expression of absolute authority; rather, these poems represent moments of authority asserting itself against considerable opposition” (*Royal Poetrie* 3-4). Perhaps no form of writing expresses this sentiment more powerfully than monarchical prison love poetry, for the politics and poetics of imprisonment and erotic desire take on a new meaning when pinned against a princely subjectivity.

Both medieval poets make repeated references to their imprisonment. After James and his fellow travelers are “[w]ith strong hand, by forse (schortly to say) / Of inmyis takin and led away,” he is put “Quare as in strayte ward and in strong prisoun” (165-66, 169). Elsewhere he calls himself “a sely prisoner” who is “within thir cald[e] wallis thus ilokin” (306, 478), and as Venus points out, because of “that *otheris* influence / Thy person standis nocht in libertee” (751-52, emphasis added). The conclusion of the poem sees the speaker regain his liberty (“To my larges that I am cumin agayne” [1266]). Similarly, Charles characterizes himself as “the most woofull caytjif of Fraunce” (715; also 1483), “caitiff” being a word for “captive” in Norman French. “To balade now y haue a fayre leysere / All other sport is me biraught as now / Martir am y and prisonere,” Charles famously exclaims (1440-43; cf. 1483-85). He is imprisoned by the allegorical figures of Thought and Woe, who hold him “As in the Prison of Grevous Displesance,” in complicity with Displeasure, Wrath, and Heaviness (1012; see also 734-37; 947-51; 3360). Danger is also among his prison wardens:

Such is Daunger, my crewell aduersayre
That of long tyme hath me in armes hent,
In euery deede so fynde y him contrayre,
That he ys glad to se m[e] thys Forschente. (778-81)

Paratextually, in a late fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript of Charles's poems (BL MS Royal 16ii), in all probability commissioned for Edward IV and later owned by Henry VII, one finds a miniature portrait of Charles as a prisoner of the Tower of London, which connects the poetic theme of imprisonment with his literal twenty-four year long captivity in England.²⁰

It has long been observed by critics that imprisonment receives radically different treatment in the poetry of James and Charles. While James makes imprisonment a major element in his poem (contrasting his incarceration that he feels so acutely during the waking part of the poem with his freedom to travel the astral planes in his dream), Charles, by contrast, only mentions it in passing in connection with his emotional state. More crucially, what is primarily a *literal* experience for the Scot is overwhelmingly a *metaphorical* incarceration for the French prince. The stony cold walls of James's literal prison never once appear in Charles's book, which is seemingly preoccupied with the inner space of a paralyzed lover imprisoned by his desire and anxiety rather than by his political foes.²¹ That assessment is accurate only to a point, for literal/figurative is often a false opposition when dealing with pre-modern poetry, particularly written in an allegorical mode. Besides, both the *Kingis Quair* and Charles's book take their cues from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* with its philosophical universality of the being-as-imprisonment trope on the one hand, and from Chaucer's

²⁰ The illustration appears, as a frontispiece or plate, in several recent books (e.g. the frontispiece of Arn, *Charles d'Orléans in England*; Coldiron, figure 1). On the picture, see Coldiron 44-45; 79-85; 182-85; on the history of the manuscript, see Backhouse.

²¹ Joanna Summers's words, "Charles wrote over 6,500 lines of English poetry while imprisoned, yet his situation is referred to, if at all, in the vaguest manner, through images of confinement, and possibly through a pervasive introspection, a sense of isolation, and a concern with separation and absence" (96), epitomize this critical sentiment. A similar attitude persists in the criticism of Charles's French poetry: as John Fox writes, "One can only wonder at the strength of a poetic tradition which made this prince of the royal blood bewail twenty-five years of captivity in a foreign land almost solely in terms of separation from his mistress, and in a manner so veiled and indirect..." (x). See also Boffey, "Chaucerian Prisoners" 88; Marks esp. 249, 255; Simpson, *Reform* 185-86.

Knight's Tale with its intricate interweaving of political incarceration and codes of courtly love on the other. While James may be depicting quasi-historically specific conditions of his imprisonment, his physical confinement is an allegorical projection of his moral failures prior to his submission to the rule of virtuous love, and thus paradoxical liberation. By the same token, Charles's apparently metaphorical imprisonment is essential to the production of his subjectivity: it is through imprisonment that his self is "divided, even fragmented, alienated from itself and from the way others perceive it" (Spearing, "Prison" 87). It is significant, for example, that Charles preserves the hope of being restored to freedom and, consequently, regaining some of his princely power. Addressing Hope in one of his carols, he exclaims: "O haue him [the speaker] sumwhat in remembraunce / And helpe him onys at large to skape & goo / The prison of Danger, his cursed foo, / Or he must die in payne and displeasaunce!" (4608-11). That Charles imagines a happier alternative to his imprisonment indicates that his subjected state causes disturbance to the structure of identity. The power of prison-as-trope is hardly inferior to that of the actual prison in James's narrative, and to overlook the complex political symbolism of Charles's work is to misread his text.²²

In short, imprisonment in the medieval poems is as much a rhetorical figure as it is a signifier of literal incarceration; and it is through this flickering of literality and figurality that imprisonment can be read into Mary's Petrarchan cycle. As I already suggested, the political circumstances of printing and circulation of Buchanan's *Detectioun*, whose publication coincided with Mary Stewart's actual incarceration, paved the way for imagining the speaker of the casket sonnets as an imprisoned monarch, especially in the minds of her Catholic sympathizers (in the words of Charles of Orléans, "[m]artir ... and prisonere"). The pamphlet, however, explicitly refers to Mary's imprisonment by her subjects, claiming that incarcerating her was the most lenient punishment that her malicious crimes warranted: "we haif kept [her] under gouernance of her kinsmen and well willing frendes: and quhom by right we might for hyr haynous deides haif executit, hir we haif touchit with na other punischment,

²² See, however, Epstein 159-80, who argues the stability, imperviousness, and consistency of the lyric subjectivities of both Charles and James in the face of their imprisonment.

but onely restraynit hyr from doing mair mischief. For we depriuit hyr nat of liberties, but of unbridelit licentiousnes of euil duing” (Oif).

At the same time, the pamphlet makes a mention of another imprisonment. After Darnley’s murder, Mary and the still married Bothwell had to remain separate for reasons of propriety. And “quhen thay could nat thinke upon a better [ruse], it semet tham a maruelous fine inuentioun god wot, that Bothwell should ravishe and take away the Quene by force,” which was put into action (Fij^v). Bothwell abducted her and took her to Dunbar, where he allegedly raped her and kept her captive for several days, until he obtained a promise from the queen to marry him. Effectively Mary was Bothwell’s prisoner for a period of time after the abduction, and even after the release she continued to be under his control. Once Bothwell had extracted a word of consent from Mary, and received word of divorce, he transported her to Edinburgh, and the manner of this conveyance is revealing: “Quhen the sentence of diuorce was geuen and sent to Dunbar, Bothwell by and by assembleth together from all pairtes, all his friendis, his seruantis, and retainers, to conuey to Edenburgh the queen, quho would then nedes take upon hir to be a *prisoner*” (Fij^t, emphasis added). The rhetoric of *Ane Detectioun* leaves little room for ambiguity – it describes Mary as a captive of Bothwell.²³

That the whole experience of Mary’s incarceration at the castle of Dunbar was a dissimulation done for amorous reasons, however, as Buchanan insists (“They could *deuise* no other but the same *counterfait* rauishment of the Quene, quahaireby the Quene prouidit for *enioying hir pleasure* and Bothwell for hys safetie” [Oiv, emphasis added]), metaphorizes Mary’s imprisonment, transforming it into a well-tried figure of courtly literature, lover as prisoner of his (or her) beloved. Known since antiquity, frequently deployed in the songs of trouveres and troubadours and chivalric romances, and prominent in Petrarch (e.g. *RVF* 89 and 97) and English Petrarchism (Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare), the trope of love-as-imprisonment provides a fertile environment for situating the casket sonnets. The most immediate precursor of the poems of James and Charles, Chau-

²³ Curiously, the Confederate Lords claimed that they were not in revolt against their queen but only sought to free her from Bothwells’s “captivity” and set her “at liberty” (Guy, *Queen of Scots* 319).

cer's *Knight's Tale*, fuses the political imprisonment of Arcite and Palamon with their erotic submission to Emelye. James in the *Kingis Quair* describes his falling in love with the lady in the garden using the trope of captivity: "sudaynly my hert became hir thrall" (285); and their union at the end of the poem receives equivalent rhetorical treatment, "Vnworthy, lo, bot onely of hir grace, / In *lufis yok* that esy is and sure, / In guerdoun of all my *lufis space*, / She hath me tak, hir humble creature" (1345-48, emphasis added). In the *Kingis Quair*, Charles, addressing his lady, claims that "yowre pleasaunt body and fawkoun / Hath me thus tane maugre all my might / For prisoner, abiding day and nyght" (249-51). The text of the casket sonnets, without explicitly mentioning imprisonment, allows for a reading along these lines, obliquely encouraged by the author of *Ane Detectioun*: the speaker refers to her alienated body that is no longer hers ("Helas, is he nat alreidy in possessioun / Of my bodie, of hart, that refuses no payne") and to the curious geographical fixedness of her desire ("Neuer will it chainge *dwelling*, or *place*" [Rij^v, Riiij^f, emphasis added]). Like James and Charles, Mary is imprisoned by love, although while James and Charles are metaphoric prisoners of passion, Mary's incarceration is also a metonymic consequence of her desire for Bothwell: not only was her desire for him a form of captivity; she is in prison now because of her love.

We should not forget, however, that serious political stakes are involved in the trope of erotic imprisonment, especially when the subject of writing is a prince. "Being held at the will of others," Joanna Summers writes in her study of late medieval prison writing, "implies a shared experience of alienation: the prisoner is objected to, subject to, and opposed by others who may decide his fate" (3). Imprisonment of a prince is an extreme form of such alienation: the one nominally in power is rendered powerless while the one formerly in a subordinate, subjected state, is elevated above the imprisoned sovereign. At the forefront of royal imprisonment is a conflict between the roles of monarch and subject, or rather a reversal of the traditional poles of power between them; and the texts of James, Charles, and Mary indeed explore multiple points where their subjectivity comes under pressure through the experience of incarceration, be it erotic or political.

Though the courtly character of James's and Charles's verse partly obfuscates the political overtones of their submission, the clichés of courtly poetry acquire disturbing connotations when issued from the mouth of a prince. Having seen a lady in the garden and fallen in love with her, James exclaims:

And though I stude abaisit tho a lyte,
No wonder was: forquhy my wittis all
Were so ouercom with plesance and delyte,
Onely throu latting of myn eyen fall,
That sudaynly my hert became hir thrall
For euer, of free wyll. (281-86)

The sovereign speaker cedes his authority and freedom to the lady and thus registers a crucial transformation in the structure of his princely identity, celebrating abasement and submission. The lady becomes his "hertis quene" and "souirane" (430, 1267), with the axis of monarchical power reversed from the speaker onto his object of desire.

Charles espouses a similar rhetorical strategy. Professing love to his lady whom he persistently describes as "my lady and souerayne" (e.g. 3706; 3754), the prince over and over again imagines himself as a poor, obedient servant subjected to his almighty beloved:

Of gyft y dar no axe [ask] so gret a thing
Of yow, because y knowe me not worthe,
But fro this tyme, my lijf forth dewryng,
If that ye lust graunt me yowre seruice fre,
That wolde y axe withouten wage or fee:
In yowre seruyce to spende my lustynes,
No more y wisshe nor axe in no degree,
So ben ye sowl my lady and maystres. (219-26)

Comaunde me what ye will in everi wise
To me that am youre sely, poore servaunt
And evermore vnto yow obeyshaunt
With myn hool hert, with power and servise. (3297-300)

Rather than claim power to himself, as befits a princely subject, Charles is willing to direct this power towards serving his mistress, declaring his obedience and obeisance.

The scenario the casket sonnets enact is nearly identical to the one we encounter in the medieval poems. Over and over the speaker confesses that she is willing to sacrifice everything for her lover: for him she has “hazardit greitnes & conscience” and “forsaken all kin and friendes, / And set aside all other respects” (Riii^v). Frequent references to “service” and “obedience” in the cycle likewise betray her readiness to relinquish her own will and be governed by her object of desire. As the following poem demonstrates, the royal speaker realizes that her office (“deuty”) requires submission from others, but she chooses to invert the roles that the traditional scenario of sovereign-subject relationship offers to her and Bothwell, embracing instead unconditional service and lowly obedience as her attributes:

For that is the onely desire of your deir love;
To serue and loue you truly,
And to esteem all wan hap lesse then nathing,
And to follow your wyll with myne,
You shall knaw with obedience,
Not forgetting the knowlege of my leal deuty,²⁴
The quhilke I shall study to the fine that may euer please you.
Loving nothing but you, in the subiectioun

²⁴ “Leal” can be emended as either “loyal,” as Staines does (47) or “real,” which is the reading suggested by Herman in his transcription (*Reading Monarchs Writing* 253). “Real” simultaneously suggests “royal, regal” (*OED*), making the contrast between Mary’s self-perceived monarchical status and her subjected state all the more poignant.

Of quhome I will without any fictioun,

Live and die, and this I consent. (Riiij^v)

The queen here indeed becomes the subject. Mary Burke has argued that “[a]s the speaker in a sonnet sequence, Mary adopts a dominant role, constructing her (silent) male beloved and their relationship as the inverse of traditional gender roles in the sonnet ... Mary can play with submission to a male beloved while exercising mastery within the political realm” (102-04). However, as these examples suggest, Mary deliberately undermines her queenly status by abandoning attributes of royal power, by forfeiting her political office and assuming the position that in an extra-textual reality would have been occupied by the addressee of her sonnets, Bothwell. In fact, as Rosalind Smith writes, in the casket sonnets “the subject’s relinquishment of honour, friends, and family is made hyperbolic by reference to her position as queen” (47). As *Ane Detectiovn* interprets it, Bothwell “alone was gouerner of all her counsels and all her affaires” (Aiiij^v), a statement supported by one of Mary’s letters where she reiterates her submission: “And to testifie vnto you quhom lawlie I submit me under your commaundementes ... for to be bestowit wrothylie under your regiment” (Ui^v-Uij^f). This last sentence is particularly intriguing through its use of the word “regiment,” traditionally associated in pre-modern English political writing with royal government.

In all three texts the scenario of amorous submission erodes the institution of royal authority, exposing it to pressure from others, even if the others are disguised as the speaker’s beloveds. Additional evidence of how the rhetoric of erotic imprisonment and submission works as an articulation of political concerns, of how the traditional courtly imagery acquires allegorical meaning can be guessed by looking at the figure of the heart. In all three poems the speaker is alienated from his or her heart. James describes his submission to love as his heart’s enslavement, “sodaynly my *hert* became hir thrall” (285, emphasis added); and he later asks Venus to “lede / My hert to rest” (363-64), both examples implying detachability of this organ. Even more graphic is the image of Charles’s heart kept as surety by Cupid and Venus, and several Ballades (6-8, 33, 37, and 56) record the lover’s conversations with his estranged heart. The prince and his heart are two, not one: “This fer from yow am y,

lady mastres, / Savyng myn hert which is left is with yow ay,” the speaker exclaims (519-20). Even when his heart is restored to him, the impression of its prosthetic character persists. Mary’s heart similarly can be disconnected from her body: “Helas, is he nat alreedy in possessioun / Of my bodie, of hart, that refuses no payne,” she writes (Rij^v), following it with another graphic image of a detachable heart, “... he made himselfe possessor of thys body. / Of the quhilk then he had nat the hart” (Riiij^v).

As the seat of passion, the heart is a standard image of courtly literature and art, a token of desire, a symbol of quasi-religious amorous devotion, and a sign of the emerging pre-modern interiority (see Erickson; Jager; Slights). At the same time, a detached *royal* heart encrypts an important political message. Body rhetoric is as pervasive in classical and pre-modern political thought as it is unstable in terms of what political institution is allegorized by a given organ (see Hale); and whereas we normally associate the king with the head of the realm, the heart, as Jacques Le Goff has shown (“Head or Heart”), is a close runner-up in medieval political treatises that describe the role of the sovereign in his kingdom. For example, he cites Henry of Mondeville (1260-1316) who imagines the heart as the centre of the body and the metaphorical centre of the body politic: “The heart is the principal organ which gives vital blood, heat and spirit to all other members of the entire body. It is located in the very middle of the chest, as befits its role as the king in the midst of his kingdom” (23). The heart is the sovereign of the body, and the sovereign is the heart of the body politic. Bernardus Silvestris (fl. 1136) identified the heart as “the animating spark of the body, nurse of its life, the creative principle and harmonizing bond of the senses; the central link in the human structure, the terminus of the veins, root of the nerves, and controller of the arteries, mainstay of our nature, king, governor, creator” (qtd. in Jager xv). Levinus Lemnius in *A Touchstone of Complexions* under the rubric “souereignty of the heart” argues that in the heart “resteth the chieftest and moste pryncipal power and faculty” (139^v). Johann Vesling’s *Anatomy of the Body of Man* (1641, English edition 1653) likewise refers to the heart as the “Prince of all the Bowels” (qtd. in Erickson 229, n. 1); whereas Gabriel Harvey in *Anatomical exercitacions concerning the generation of living creatures* (1653) described the heart “Queen Regent of the animal body” (qtd. in Slights 3). Jonathan Sawdy links the

demystification of the heart in seventeenth-century medical discourse, its purging of the Aristotelian and Galenic metaphoricity and allegoricity, to the collapse of the institution of sacred kingship and ultimately the execution of Charles I (“Transparent Man” 19-20). A heart severed from the body, then, becomes a surreptitious metaphor for a ruler ripped out of his body politic, of a monarch imprisoned and forcefully separated from his realm.

Indeed, as I would like to argue, in the texts of James, Charles, and Mary royal erotic imprisonment and disempowerment becomes a figure of discourse that hypostasizes a broader reality of the strained sovereign-subject relationship in the pre-modern political culture of England and Scotland. An erosion of princely power through imprisonment is far from accidental in the texts we discuss; rather, it is informed by a number of events and discourses that make royal imprisonment a key political trope in the English-speaking context. Without falling into a biographical fallacy, it is still revealing that the two medieval fictional narratives of royal disempowerment, the *Kingis Quair* and the duke’s book, symptomatize the political careers of the two medieval princes. If Charles’s rule was secure in Orléans, during his English imprisonment he had to become a historical witness to the Treaty of Troyes between England and France, an agreement that effectively deprived him of the right to inherit the French throne as his potential title was claimed by Henry V. Charles was never the most immediate heir to the throne, but his ascension to the throne of France was not impossible; the closest he came to becoming king of France was in 1422 after the death of Charles VI, but his captivity in England prevented it.

The case of James I of Scotland is even more illuminating. The ineffective rule of James’s father, king Robert III, was particularly rife with confrontations with his subjects, from which the king rarely emerged victorious. When James’s elder brother and heir to the throne David was starved to death by the king’s political opponents, James’s political value rose dramatically for all parties, but it also made the young prince a pawn in the hands of the king’s subjects who sought to use James to their advantage. During James’s imprisonment in England, according to Bower, “king Henry V tried to subject both him and the kingdom of Scotland to his dictation of perpetual servitude” (309), some-

thing that the fictional James experiences at the hands of his lady. While in captivity, James was also involved in Henry V's military expeditions in France where he had to – unsuccessfully – attempt to command his own countrymen who supported the Dauphin (see Brown 9-33). Upon his return to Scotland, James discovered that “royal authority had been in abeyance for many years, and that he lacked both experience of Scottish politics and a secure territorial or personal base” (A.D.M. Barrell 154). His rule did bring results (e.g. the destruction of the Albany Stewarts and the Black Douglases), but eventually one of his subjects, Robert Graham, speaker of the Estates, first tried to arrest the king in Parliament in the name of magnates and shortly afterwards assassinated James.

Little in the pre-modern history of England and Scotland, however, can compare to Mary Stewart's antagonistic relationship with her subjects, for her deposition was one of the most radical acts of early modern politics. Her own downfall and imprisonment I discussed above were prefigured by her mother's political misfortunes. In 1557-59 Scottish Protestants clashed – in some cases rather violently – with Mary's mother, Mary of Guise, who was regent of Scotland at the time, in a confrontation that served as a prelude to Mary's own plight in the late 1560s. The growing popularity and influence of Protestant preachers on the one hand, and Mary of Guise's pro-French and pro-Catholic policies on the other resulted in a series of military showdowns between the Scots (tacitly supported by Elizabeth I) and French mercenaries, which became more violent after the Congregation revoked Mary's regency and declared her a threat to the commonwealth. In 1560, the Scots and English armies joined forces against those of Mary of Guise at Leith, but her death made further confrontation unnecessary.

The mouthpiece for this act of anti-monarchical aggression was John Knox, whose writings over the course of 1560s (*The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, *The Appellation to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland*, and *The Letter to the Commonality of Scotland*) developed – gradually, from acknowledging passive disobedience to encouraging active subversion – a theory of resistance to the sovereign who violates the terms of the contract with his people. Since obedience to God always trumps obedience to temporal authority, in a situation where the mon-

arch does not belong to the true religion (i.e. Protestantism) it is not only the right but the duty of the subject to resist and even overthrow his sovereign. While developing these ideas, Knox had in mind Protestant Edwardian and later Marian England, but in 1560 the Scottish Parliament officially made Scotland a Protestant commonweal, which, in Knox's eyes, justified the deposition of Mary of Guise (see Burns, *True Law* 122-84; R.A. Mason 139-64). Modest as Knox's theory of armed resistance was in its insistence that it applied exclusively to elect Protestant nations, it still imagined the sovereign-subject relationship in terms of submission.²⁵

Indeed, royal submission to the will of subjects – a characteristic feature of all three texts I am discussing here – resonates with the political settlements of pre-modern England and Scotland, namely, a composite system of *dominium politicum et regale*, i.e. a form of lordship at once political and royal, where the king does not establish laws without the consent of the realm. This view finds its most comprehensive articulation in the works of Sir John Fortescue (c. 1394–1476), especially *De laudibus legum Angliae*, a dialogue between a young prince and an aged councilor written by Fortescue in Scotland and France between 1468 and 1470 and printed, in Richard Mulcaster's English translation, in London in 1567, 1573, and 1599 as *A learned commendation of the politique lawes of Englande*. Fortescue writes:

For the kynge of Englande can not alter nor change the lawes of his royalmē at his pleasure. For why he gouerneth his people by power not onely roial but also politique. Yf his power ouer them were roial lonely then he might change the lawes of his royalmē, and charge his subiects with tallag and other burdens without their consent. And such is the dominion that the ciuile lawes purport when they saye: The princeis pleasure hath the force of a lawe. But from this mucche differeth the power of

²⁵ Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet* is also famous for its misogynist repudiation of female rule; though technically written against Mary Tudor's imposition of Catholicism in England, it nonetheless was equally applicable (despite Knox's own retractions) to the rules of both Elizabeth and Mary Stewart. Knox's invectives against female rule are of course a symptom of further constraints imposed on female Renaissance rulers by their gender. On Mary's conflict with Scotland's patriarchal system of power, see Walton; Warnicke, *Mary Queen of Scots*.

a kynge, whose gouernment ouer his people is politique. For he can neither change lawes with out the consent of his subiects, nor yet charge them with straunge im-
piosicions against their wylles (25^v-26^r)

The people are subjects of the king, but their consent and counsel are indispensable for the functioning of the government (see Black 168-69; Burns, *Lordship* 58-70).²⁶ This settlement ascribes to both parties their specific roles and obligations: just as the kingdom requires a monarch, the latter depends on the body of the realm, i.e., on his subjects. In a perfect world, the king and parliament work together to secure the stability of the realm, but in times of political crisis there is a conflict between the two, because the power of the sovereign encounters an obstacle in the political will of his subjects.²⁷

In Scotland the situation was even more volatile. On the one hand, there is a persistent cultural and historiographical myth that the Scottish sovereign was answerable to the people; and as a *dominium politicum et regale* Scotland did place certain constraints on her kings and their authority, although in that regard she was no different from many other pre-modern states (Goodare 17-18). On the other hand, though historians alert us to the glaring absence of any theoretical endorsement of the king's answerability or the right of the subjects to oppose the king in Scottish political thought between the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath and the conciliarist theologian John Mair's 1521 *History of Greater Britain* (see R.A. Mason 8-77), actual acts of resistance to the king were not unheard of in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scotland. One of the reasons was that, in practical terms, in many aspects (such as finances, political influence, cultural domination, military power, control over legislation) the Scottish monarch was still *primus inter pares* vis-à-vis magnates and nobles (Goodare 44-

²⁶ This political sentiment finds its manifestation in the large corpus of English and Scottish advice to princes literature: English and Scots translations of (pseudo-) Aristotle's *Secretum Secretorum* and of Giles of Rome's *De Regimine Principum*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, and Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, the anonymous *Buke of the Ordre of Knychthede and Spectacle of Luf*, John Ireland's *Merrour of Wyssdome* and the Tudor *Mirror for Magistrates*. This evidence is particularly interesting for Scotland, where advice to princes literature was commissioned predominantly not by the kings (as it was in England), but by aristocrats, as a way of controlling the king (Mapstone, "Kingship" 64). See Budra; Ferster.

²⁷ David Rollinson in his recent book makes an interesting case for the presence of a continuous tradition of popular resistance and rebellion in English political theory and practice from Edward III to Elizabeth. See 205-91.

50). In 1542 Mary was the sixth Scots monarch in a row to inherit the throne as a minor, which inevitably limited the powers of the king and “created a structure for the government of the country in which an adult king was not necessary for the actual running of the government” (Walton 16). While theoretical formulations of anti-monarchical resistance in Scotland were rare, the everyday practice of kingship did face multiple challenges from subjects. As I already mentioned, James I was assassinated by his subject, but his heirs fared marginally better: the Douglas clan openly defied James II in the 1450s, and James III was killed in 1488 in a battle against an army of rebels.

Not surprisingly, royal imprisonments were part of the political reality of pre-modern England and Scotland. In England one only has to recall the unfortunate fates of Edward II, Richard II, Henry VI, Edward V, Elizabeth I, and later Charles I. Similarly, in 1524-27, the twelve-year old James V, Mary Stewart’s father, was a “prisoner” of one of his subjects, Angus Douglas. James V was crowned at thirteen months in 1513, but due to his minority he resided with (and was controlled by) his mother Margaret Tudor and Angus in turns. In 1525 Angus refused to let the young king go and held him in captivity until 1528, when James managed to escape and assume rule of Edinburgh and later the country.

But the most intriguing fact about pre-modern England and Scotland, however, is that the strained relationship between subjects and rulers was theorized and represented in political discourse as a form of imprisonment. In both Fortescue’s *Learned commendation* and George Buchanan’s political dialogue, *De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus (A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots)*, we find the trope of royal incarceration embedded in the imaginary structure of kingship. Fortescue’s book not only opens with a historical reference to “the cruell rage of the late mortall warres within the realme of Englande.... [when] the king himself [Henry VI] afterward in the same ciuil tumult falling into the bloody hands of his deadly enemies his own subjects was of them committed to prison, wher he a long tyme remained in strane captiuitie” (3^r), but his theory of monarchy is underwritten by the ideas of “freedom and servitude” (Jordan, *Monarchies* 25) – more accurately, liberty and imprisonment. When Fortescue’s alter ego urges the prince to study the divine laws, he likens

monarchical rule to a form of service to God: “For the principall poynte of all seruyce is to knowe the wyll and pleasure of the lord or maister to whome seruyce is due” (6^r). This alone suggests that this ruler is inscribed in a complex system of power and submission, but explaining why he prefers limited (political) to absolute (royal) monarchy, Fortescue cites Aquinas who “in the booke which he wrote to the kynge of Cyprus of the gouernaunce of princeis wisheth the state of a roialme to be such, that it may not be in the kyngs power to oppresse his people with tyrannye. Whiche thyng is yformed onely whyle the power royall is restrained by power politique” (26^v). The Latin original is more direct: the condition of an ideal realm is that the king should not be *free* to tyrannize his people (“vt rex non libere valeat populum tirannide gubernare”). The non-tyrannical, limited monarch is not free – that is, imprisoned by the political power of the subjects.

It is therefore not unexpected, Fortescue continues, that “some kynges of Englande not well brooking as thinkynge that thereby they should not freely gouerne their subiects as other kynges do, whose realme is onely regall ... went about to cast of[f] the yoke politique” not heeding that “to ruele the people by government politique is no yoke, but libertie” (77^v-78^r). To alleviate the trauma of the distressing image of a sovereign figuratively incarcerated by his subjects, Fortescue uses a rhetorical sleight-of-hand and paradoxically presents limited rule as true freedom, in contrast to the superficial liberty of an absolute monarch that in fact entails enslavement. The king who violates his law, or rather whose own pleasure is the law and whose subjects are thus debilitated financially and emotionally by the king’s unlimited power, Fortescue argues, “is not to be iudged free, being tyed with so many bandes of feeblenes. On the other side that kyng is free and of myghte that is hable to defende his subiectes as well agaynste straungers as agaynste his owne people” (98^v). That is, the freedom (Mulcaster uses the term “power” but in Fortescue’s Latin original the word is “libertate”) of an unlimited ruler who is “at libertie to deale wrongfully is not by such liberty augmented and increased,” whereas being restrained by the law results in an increase of freedom: “So then to bee of habilitie or power to do euill (as is the kinge that regaly doth rule, and that with mucche more liberties, then the king that hath a politique dominion ouer his people) is rather a diminution then an increase of power”

(35^{r-v}). To avoid portraying a limited monarch as imprisoned, Fortescue is forced to have recourse to the figure of paradox, but he explicitly injects the categories of imprisonment and liberty into the structure of monarchical rule.

We encounter an analogous rhetorical strategy in Buchanan's *De Iure Regni*. Published in 1579 in Edinburgh, the dialogue was probably written in the immediate wake of Mary's abdication and thus has a close connection to the text of *Ane Detectioun*. What will concern us here are the dialogue's unequivocal endorsement of limited monarchy and the language in which this right is justified. Very early in the text Buchanan, one of the speakers, establishes that rulers are answerable to their subjects ("kings are created, not for themselves, but for the people" [23]), to which Maitland, his interlocutor, agrees ("the people have the right to bestow authority on whomever they wish" [27]), for it guarantees accountability and helps to avoid tyranny. In a hereditary monarchy like Scotland, however, history becomes the source of legitimization: in order to provide foundation to the right to resist kings Buchanan turns to Scottish history and kings deposed by their subjects, for example James III ("All the estates passed judgment in a public assembly that James III had been justly slain because of his extreme cruelty to his subjects and his scandalous infamy" [127]). Historical evidence leads him to conclude that there is a contract between the king and his people; if it is broken by the sovereign, his right to require obedience is forfeited ("There is, therefore, a mutual pact between a king and his subjects ... If the tie which bound together the king and the people is broken, therefore, any right belonging to the one who broke the pact is, I think, forfeited" [153]). Buchanan's king appears to be quite limited in his power as subjects are granted every right to exercise control over their sovereigns.

Crucially, the rhetoric both Buchanan and Maitland adopt to place constitutional constraints upon the king's power to rule replicates Fortescue's words:

M. But in entrusting the government of the kingdom to laws rather than to kings, you must beware, I beg you, not to subject this man, whom in name you have made a king, to a tyrant who can 'hold him down by his authority and curb him with chains

and prison-bars'; and only stop short of loading him with fetters and sending him to work on the land or to serve in the mill.

B. Fine words! I am not imposing anyone as master over him, but I want the people, who have granted him authority over themselves, to be allowed to dictate to him the extent of his authority, and I require him to exercise as king only such right as the people have granted him over them. (55)

Like Fortescue, the trope Buchanan chooses to describe the structure of limited monarchy is royal incarceration and subsequent submission to the will of the subjects, what he elsewhere in the dialogue calls “the prison of the law” (35). To avoid this, the king rules guided by counsel of his subjects, with their best representatives carefully chosen to assist the king (“selected men from all estates should meet with the king in council” [55]). However, the precise dividing line between productive collaboration of king and subjects on the one hand, and imprisonment that overmasters the sovereign and reduces him to a political – and rhetorical – prisoner of the people remains blurry. Unlike Fortescue who attempts to mask the king’s submission by extolling the true freedom of limited monarchy and suggesting it as a way out of the fictitious liberty (but actual slavery) of absolute power, Buchanan bluntly convicts his monarch (i.e. Mary Stewart) to a life sentence in the prison of public politics.

Fortescue’s and Buchanan’s treatises map out an important discursive space in pre-modern Scottish and English political culture where not only sovereignty is easily controlled by the body of subjects, but where an extreme form of this constraint is conceptualized in terms of royal incarceration. It is therefore not accidental that his *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) – a statement of absolutist ambition written, as scholars speculate, in response to Buchanan’s dialogue – James VI/I is at pains to characterize himself as “free and absolute *Monarche*” (64), and to reinstate within political discourse the normative relationship of subject and sovereign: the subjects’ obedience is described in biblical terms as “that yoke, which God at your earnest suite hath laid vpon you” so that “the best and noblest of your blood shall be compelled in slauish and seruile offices to serue [the king],” who is “Master ouer euery person that inhabiteth the same, hauing power ouer life and death of euery one of

[his subjects]” (*Political Writings* 68-69, 75). Since James’s king must assume his rightful position of the free and absolute master over his subjects, one cannot help but wonder to what extent this obsessive insistence on the sovereign’s freedom reflects his yearning to overturn not only Buchanan’s pamphlet and his mother’s political imprisonment and poetic disempowerment, but the long tradition of Scottish and English theory of kingship, in which royal imprisonment and servitude appear to be inseparable from the discourse of monarchy, as well.

Monarchs Writing/Writing Monarchs

Royal subjection takes on a new meaning if we probe the question of writing; and before we move to the problem of authorship, it is worth remembering that none of the poets – even if we entertain the possibility that the historical James, Charles, and Mary conceived and composed the poems under discussion – actually *wrote* the texts that we read. When preparing the two manuscripts of his poetry, Charles apparently employed an English-speaking scribe who used the French manuscript, completed earlier, as his model, but the duke’s supervision and control over his work must have been “intermittent” at best (Arn, “Two Manuscripts” 67). The Selden manuscript, the only surviving copy of the *Kingis Quair*, contains a handful of poems, including Scotticized versions of Chaucer’s *Troilus* and *Parliament* (with an apocryphal ending) and Hoccleve’s *Letter of Cupid* as well as miscellaneous Scottish verse. Neither its scribe nor commissioner is known. Critics speculate that it may have originated in aristocratic circles, probably the Sinclair family who owned the manuscript and was related to the royal house of Stewarts (the first Henry Sinclair was in English captivity together with James),²⁸ but it is clear that the poetic persona of James I was appropriated by an anonymous compiler who nonetheless made it his task to indicate that the poem had been composed by “Iacobus primus scotorum rex Illustrissimus.” Likewise, Mary’s verse comes to us mediated by Buchanan (“G.B.”) and possibly others, and the Anglo-Scots poems in *Ane Detectiovn* have been aptly de-

²⁸ See Boffey and Edward’s edition of the manuscript and their introduction, as well as Bowers 293; Martin 29-31; Petrina 9-11.

scribed as “‘ventriloquized’ texts” (Dunnigan 19). If we add to this that none of the poems has been conclusively attributed to its alleged royal author, it is not unreasonable to imagine a possibility that all three royal texts were written – in all senses of the word – by subjects.

This possibility, too tempting to be discarded, has a direct bearing upon our present discussion of power and submission in royal verse. While one might legitimately point out that there is hardly anything unusual in the use of scribes in pre-modern culture, and for example the works of Chaucer, Langland, and Gower have been preserved by identical means, just as that a great many other medieval and early modern poems have eschewed watertight attribution, the royal status of the speakers warrants further inquiry. If we concede that someone else composed the poems, or if even someone else inscribed them in a non-monarchical hand, then the royal voice (and the royal text) become little more than a figuration of discourse. Any subject can mime the king and thus impose himself onto the royal throne (or at the royal writing desk). In a situation where a subject can usurp the royal quill, kingship becomes in part a textual effect, iterable and citable, not limited to an actual bearer of royal title.²⁹ Commenting upon the proliferation of monarchical texts in early modern England, Kevin Sharpe points out that “the very development that led to the predominance of the word in the exercise of political authority also sowed the seeds of challenge to a monopoly or control of discourse, hence to power” (“King’s Writ” 118; see also *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*). Writing (a poem) in the voice of a monarch opens the institution of kingship to a discursive reappropriation by its subjects. The capacity of the royal word to remain inviolable and inalienable has its limits.

Therein lies the fundamental paradox of the royal text. As Louise Fradenburg observes in *City, Marriage, Tournament*, a book that investigates the imaginative constructions of sovereignty in medieval Scotland, kingship is the product of a complex relationship between sovereign and subject:

²⁹ In this regard the medieval texts I am discussing here are important precursors for Wyatt’s *Penitential Psalms* in which the Tudor poet takes on the mask of King David (and of Henry VIII). See, however, Summers, who links prison writing to the emergence of literary autobiography and insists that prison writing is characterized by a heightened sense of credibility, i.e. the ability of the writer to persuade his audience of his cause (1-23, *passim*). Summers’s readings differ from mine in one fundamental aspect, namely, she ignores the question of princely authority.

There is no secure borderline between sovereign and subject – the subject, for example, must identify to some degree with the sovereign, the sovereign with the subject – and while this permeability of sovereign and subject can produce severe anxiety, it is also in part how the experience of rule is produced ... The sovereign is created in and through the inventive activity of his subjects; he depends upon their willingness to “produce” him as unique, both through works of imagination and works of labor.

(xii)

Perhaps no other texts illustrate the ambivalences of this paradox more vividly than the writings of James, Charles, and Mary – writings where political and textual alienation reveals the royal voice to be transferrable and mimable, indeed an artifact constructed through the subjects’ “works of imagination and works of labor.” Their texts enact a more disturbing scenario of the sovereign-subject relationship, one in which the roles of the ruler and the ruled are reversed, where power sinks into submission, and royal identity is repeatedly undone through an elusive act of prison writing. Undone, but at the same time reconstructed, for in monarchical writing both sovereign and subject become sites of effacement and re-inscription. Whatever the subject’s role in producing a piece of writing in the voice of a monarch, the ultimate effect of such writing is almost the erasure from the text of the subject’s identity, which is overwritten by that of his sovereign. Inscribing sovereign identity, the subject leaves his own marks on the text, but these marks are subsumed by the name of the ruler when the text is claimed by the latter through what can be best described as a proto-Hegelian lord-bondsman dialectic.³⁰

Potential usurpation of the royal hand requires strategies to authenticate it. One of the strategies all three texts deploy is a distinct form of corporeal textuality – textuality where the opposition between physical body and written language is subverted, and the body and the word are placed on the same level. Preparing to commit his erotic experience to writing, James explains to the reader: “I

³⁰ In writing this paragraph, I benefited from Judith Butler’s reading of Hegel in *Psychic Life of Power* (34-53).

set me down, / And furthwithall my pen in hand I tuke / And maid a [cros], and thus begouth my booke” (89-91). But instead of the word “cros” the manuscript contains the sign of a cross, and as a result of this gesture the opposition between the text and the poet’s hand is collapsed. Body, as it were, invades the space of writing. Even more cogently, Charles’s attempts to inscribe his physical body into his poems occur throughout the sequence.³¹ In the opening narrative, the speaker cannot approach his lady so Hope procures pen and paper for him so he can inscribe his desire (“Good Hope, as loo, was no thing to seche, / For penne and papir he had found anoon” [196-97]). His heart reads a book in which all his suffering is written (420-27), the suffering that “shirtith me more nerre than doth my skyn” (494). Later he admits that although he may never see his lady, his writing shall (“Syn y ne may as se yow, neuyrtheles / My writing shall, so Ihesu ben his gide” [1374-75]); moreover, his poems will come in physical contact with her (“Wite ye, y haue a writ out for the same / To tache yow with” [3825-26]). The washing of hands during the jubilee feast is also textualized through the “wesshe”/ “wash”/“wisshe” pun (4389-97). In general, his body seems to function more easily through writing than on its own (“y kan bettir playne / Bi writing then bi mouth” [5404-05]). The penultimate poem of the cycle reiterates this interpenetration of writing and body as the speaker sends out his “poore bille ... / Forblot with teeris of myn eyen twayne” (6500-01), leaving the reader with a sheet of paper covered with blurred writing that is presumably difficult, if possible at all, to decipher. In a similar wise, the speaker of the casket sonnets concludes the sequence with an envoy, “Not seing you as you had promist, / I put my hand to the paper to write” (Si^t), shrinking the temporal and spatial distance between writing and desire, between the poet’s hand and paper.

In all three poems, then, the radical alterity of body and language is suspended as the two are revealed as “fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality [i.e.

³¹ See also Spearing, *Subjectivity* 229-47 for a detailed discussion of the textuality of poetic subjectivity in Charles’s cycle; and Coldiron 49-60.

body] are never fully identical nor fully different” (Butler, *Bodies* 69). The significance that the writing body acquires in royal prison poetry points to a number of things: in addition to the pre-modern “interweaving of words and things” where language does not exist as an independent system of signs but functions on a par with objects of the world,³² this writerly strategy places the body of the poet, alerted to the prospect of his or her text being appropriated by another, within the text, so that this physical bodily presence interwoven with the materiality of writing can claim the space of writing to its originator, the royal scribe.³³ It might also be an attempt to construct a textual body as a substitute for the alienated and usurped physical and political body of the imprisoned and subjected sovereign.

In this connection it is instructive to look at one of the metaphors that both the medieval princes deploy to describe their subjected state. In the following excerpts, both James and Charles compare themselves to the mathematical sign of zero (cipher). The first passage is taken from the *Kingis Quair*; the second from Charles’s sequence:

Than wold I say, ‘gif God me had deuisit
 To lyve my lyf in thraldome thus and pyne,
 Quhat was the cause that he [me] more comprisit
 Than othir folk to lyve in suich ruyne?
 I suffer allone amang the figuris nyne,
 Ane wofull wrecche that to no wight may spede,

³² See Foucault, *Order of Things* 38-46. Another point of reference here might be the importance of oralized reading for pre-modern culture. Although silent reading was not unknown in classical antiquity, and it spread almost universally in Europe between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, trickling from monasteries to universities and secular circles of readers, orality still persisted in the Western culture of reading as a form of public courtly entertainment into the early modern period (e.g. Charles d’Orléans’s poetry is likely to have been performed orally, and the English cycle, as Coldiron has shown [49-56], is preoccupied with transcending the boundaries between text and voice, seeing and hearing). Reading aloud, to a greater degree than silent reading, involves work of the body: vocal articulations, gestures, muscular strains. The person reading aloud, so to speak, orchestrates the written text with his body, diminishing the distance between body and language. See Chartier, *Forms and Meanings* 15-16, and “Reading Aloud,” Nelson; Saenger.

³³ Consider also the royal poets’ preoccupation with originality: James undertakes “[s]um new[e] thing to write” (89); whereas Mary is adamant about her status as an original poet, unlike her beloved’s wife whose writings she “nat the lesse did not breid in hir braine, / But borrowit from sum feate authour” (Rijj’).

And yit of every lyvis help hath need.' (190-96)

Me thynkith right as a syphir now y serue,

That number makith and is him silf noon.

O cursed Deth, whi nelt thou do me strue,

Syn my swet hert – syn my good sowl – is goon?

Now may y say alone y goo, alon,

Savying with Sorow, Payne, and Displesere,

With whos deth all welthe became my foon,

For without hir of nought now lyue y here. (2042-49)

It is not the similarity between the rhetorical strategies of James and Charles himself that deserves our attention, however. Rather, the ambiguity of the symbolism of zero is what makes the use of the figure paradigmatic for all forms of sovereign writing. On the one hand, through our modern concept of zero as a signifier of nothing (Charles's "nought" and James's "wofull wrecche that to no wight may spede, / And yit of every lyvis help hath need") it is easy to read these stanzas as an expression of powerlessness, worthlessness, and abasement. On the other hand, the sign of zero, which was introduced into the West in the thirteenth century and revolutionized European mathematics, despite its association with absence and nothingness, is indispensable to the production of numbers; as Charles elaborates, "syphir ... number makith and is him silf noon." An empty character turns out to be the privileged member within the system of mathematical signs, just like Charles's "cyphir" is an element at once worthless and the most powerful "among the figuris nyne." In other words, zero, as Brian Rotman has argued, "represents the starting point of the process; indicating the virtual presence of the counting subject at the place where that subject begins the whole activity of traversing what will become a sequence of counted positions" (13). Simultaneously part of the sequence and the meta-sign outside it that allows the sequence to occur, the figure of zero epitomizes monarchical writing which is impotent in the sense that any subject can usurp it, but ultimately dominant, because through an act

of usurping the king's writ the subject comes into being. Monarchical writing makes other writing possible; by miming the sovereign the subject at once asserts his authority over the ruler and exposes his total dependency on the text of his king – that is, enacts his subjection.

Vicissitudes of Royal Eros: Governance of Pleasures

Let us return to the political implications of monarchical desire. Passionate love marks all three speakers; subsumed by desire, they submit themselves to the overwhelming power of unrequited erotic experience. Yet the princely status of the lovers prevents reading their amorous subjugation solely as a convention of courtly culture. On the contrary, monarchical passion transcends the limits of private emotion and, politicized, concerns itself with the public questions of polity and governance, including self-governance. As Louise Fradenburg writes, “the careful management of the creative power of desire is crucial to the art of sovereign love” (*City* 73; also 67-83). Documenting sovereign love, the poems of James, Charles, and Mary all seek to negotiate a legitimate space for sovereign erotic desire within the structures of the pre-modern public sphere, imagining different – albeit structurally analogous – regimes of royal passion and authority.

As part of *Ane Detectioun*, Mary's sonnets are at an epicentre of a fierce quarrel between two views on royal passion. On the one side, we witness dissolution of royal power in unchecked submission to love:

My loue increaseth and more will increase,
So lang as I shall lief, and I shall holde for ane greit felicitie
To haue onely pairt of that hart,
To the quhilk at length my loue sall appeare,
So clearely, that he sall neuer doubt.
For him I will striue against wan weard,
For him I will recerfe greitnes,

And sall do so mikle that he shall know
That I haif no wealth, hap, not contentation,
But to obay, and serue him truely. (Riii^{r-v})

Passion appears to take full control over the speaker's political identity. Although Mary realizes that by relinquishing her self to her beloved she will reap grave consequences in terms of her reputation and office ("I in obeying you may receive dishonour ... / And I for luifing you may receive blame;" "For him I haif despisit honour" [Rij^r, Riiij^v]), she readily embraces her love and its emotional and political corollaries. Sovereignty yields to love, or, as Sarah Dunnigan notes, the poems "at once serve as a political assertion of eros, and an erotic assertion, or rather negation, of political desires ... there *are* no boundaries between erotic and sovereign selves [in her sonnets]" (27-29). Peter Herman, likewise, comments on this paradox: "Mary uses her position as monarch to undermine her position as monarch ... to articulate her personal subjectivity while destroying her political subjectivity" (*Royal Poetrie* 97-98).

On the other side, those writing *around* the casket sonnets measure Mary's sovereign love against a quasi-Stoic concept of monarchy, imagining a (masculine) ruler whose firm mastery over passions makes him Mary's complete antipode. For the authors of *Ane Detectioun*, the queen's behaviour before and after Darnley's murder was execrable: an adulteress and an accomplice in the king's death, "in all her wordes and doyinges sche neuer kept any regard, I will nat say of Quenelike maiestie, but nat of matronlike modestie," and she spent her days "in unprincely licentiousnesse" (Bi^{r-v}). Her love for Bothwell is an "outrageous lust" (Biiij^v) that destroys not only her own political and gendered identity (both "Quenelike maiestie" and "matronlike modestie" alike), but the foundations of the Scottish realm.

Buchanan and Cecil did not need to go far to find theoretical support for their claims. John Knox's obloquy of female rule *The First Blast of the Trumpet against Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) was explicitly aimed at Mary Tudor, but two other Marys, regent of Scotland Mary of Guise

and her daughter *de jure* Scottish queen Mary Stewart, were easily identifiable targets of his hostile attack:

And Aristotle, as before is touched, doth plainly affirme, that whersoever women beare dominion, there must nedes the people be disordred, livinge and abounding in all intemperancie, geven to pride, excesse, and vanitie ... I might adduce histories, proving some women to have died for sodein joy; some for unpacience to have murdered them selves, some to have burned with such inordinat lust, that for the quenching of the same, they have betrayed to strangiers their countrie and citie; ... and some have killed with crueltie their owne husbandes and children. (376)

His words proved prophetic in 1567, for the situation the authors of *Ane Detectiovn* had on their hands replicated Knox's scenario to the letter: not only Mary "burned with such inordinat lust" that she sacrificed her royal duty and office for Bothwell, but she was claimed "to have killed with crueltie" her husband Darnley for the sake of quenching her desire. The reason for the murder was "that the saim filthy mariage with Bothwell might be accomplished" for he was loved by her "outragiouly and intemperately" (Mij^v, Jij^v). But such are the natures of some women, *Ane Detectiovn* argues, that "they haue vehement affections baith wayes, thay loue with excesse, and hait without measure, and to quhat side sa euer thay bend, thay are not gourened by aduised reason, but carried by violent motion" (Gi^v). Mary was "a woman burning in hatrid of hir husband, and in loue of ane adulter, and in baith these diseasis of corrupt affactionis unbridelit" (Hij^f). Indeed, as Mary herself predicted, her reward for loving Bothwell was dishonour and blame.

In order to understand what a radical departure from the ideal of kingship Mary was for those behind *Ane Detectiovn*, we need to take another look at Buchanan's *De Iure Regni*. There Buchanan explains that a healthy commonweal led by a king is characterized by justice, which is for him indistinguishable from temperance ("the restraint of the passions" [25]). It is the sovereign who is entrusted with maintaining justice in the realm, but "since we fear that [the king] may not be strong enough to combat his emotions, which can and usually do divert men from the truth, we shall give

him the law as a colleague or rather as a curb on his passions” (33). Kings, like all men, harbour “two hideous monsters . . . anger and lust,” and the law imposed upon the king seeks “to subject these monsters to reason and to restrain them by the fetters of the law’s own command if they do not submit to reason” (131). Hatred and desire, we have just seen, are Mary’s primary passions, and her crime is that she failed to submit them to reason. Like so many other failed monarchs before her, she was “weakened by the allurements of pleasure” (79) and forgot her office. That, needless to say, makes her unsuitable to govern (proving that, we might recall, was one of the purposes of *Ane Detectioun*). Although Buchanan does not rely on misogynist rhetoric in his treatise, it is implied that a female ruler is even less likely to be able to regulate her passions. In *Ane Detectioun* (as well as silently in *De Iure Regni*) he attacks Mary predominantly because she “cannot control her passions and therefore cannot fulfill the demands of a *rex stoicus*, a king who governs with strict moral rectitude, without regard to his passions” (Staines 43). Failure to self-govern leads to inability to govern others.

Buchanan and Cecil were not alone in linking Mary’s sexuality with her fall as a political figure: various written sources within and outside of royal court, from broadside ballads to court masks, dating from both before and after her deposition, repeatedly undertook the eroticizing of Mary’s image (see Dunnigan 22-27; Kingsley-Smith 96-102; Philips), and what was eulogized in Catholic France and reluctantly tolerated in Protestant Scotland in the early years of her reign became, often retroactively, incriminating evidence after her downfall. Mary’s sexuality and its explicit verbalizations in the casket sonnets were bound to be at loggerheads with the political and gendered ideology of Scottish patriarchy, and the conflict appears particularly disastrous in that Mary’s passion not simply attracts disapproval but in fact invalidates her sovereignty. The path of submitting to desire chosen by her led to an almost complete disintegration of her royal self.

That in Mary’s poetry an attempt to combine sovereignty and vehement libidinous emotions ends in a catastrophe does not mean that such a unity is not achievable in theory, nor that in early

modern culture passions were universally condemned and the Stoic ideal disseminated.³⁴ Nor does it mean that her exploration of discursive possibilities for monarchical eros is a unique product of the situation that transpired in Scotland and England in the late 1560s and early 1570s. On the contrary, the questions that the casket sonnets posed were hardly new to the type of writing that we are concerned with here. Both Charles and especially James investigate the exact same issues that obsess Mary and the authors of *Ane Detectioun*. That the answers they come up with differ is hard to refute, but the anatomy of the poetic voice in the three texts is remarkably similar.

Charles's case is probably the more difficult to make. Despite his poetic cycle's not inconsiderable length, there appears to be little development of the poet's courtly subjectivity; and his erotic longing fails to receive the universalizing treatment of his sources, making his book "a counter to the Boethian view of *libertas* attained through reasoned self-rule and the alignment of free will" (Summers 103). Instead of overcoming his amorous obsession through self-governance, Charles throughout the book "remains imprisoned by his desires and increasingly subject to Fortune" (Summers 103). This interpretation might suggest that the value and validity of desire are never interrogated in Charles's poetry or, more importantly, that passion is conceived outside the referential frame of princely power. I would like to argue, however, that the balance between submission to the rule of desire and resistance to it is subtler in the duke's book. Granted, moral aspects of desire do not form a priority for the speaker, but to claim that Charles is unaware of different erotic regimes of the courtly self is to miss a crucial point. For example, during the jubilee banquet (4319-637), the poet addresses his guests, who are lovers as well, and exhorts them to keep their sexual appetites in check:

For, trowth, I loue who secret is and wise,
Owt shewit not in word nor countenance
On [one] wanton look, nor yet no tacchis nise,
As through the which vnbridelid goueraunce

³⁴ As Richard Strier has recently argued, the Renaissance revival of Stoicism was accompanied by a revival of anti-Stoicism, and "both the humanist and the Reformation traditions provided powerful defenses of the validity and even the desirability of ordinary human emotions and passions" (42).

That folke shuld thence [think]. (4333-37)

Though these lines might be taken merely to insist upon the importance of seemliness, references to wisdom and to (failed) governance of desire suggest mechanisms of philosophical self-regulation that penetrate the veneer of bodily decorum and cut to the deeper foundations of identity. Such self-discipline is not a manual of courtly propriety but a set of principles that shapes the whole identity of a princely lover. “Forto contynew forth in stedfastnes,” Charles appeals to his audience, “Rathir then ben taynt in dowbilnes, / For ner not Trouth, Loue hath no champioun” (4357-59). Self-governance in love turns out to be a pathway to philosophical truth.

Is that the road Charles himself takes? Not quite. Shortly before the cycle draws to a close, he makes two attempts to free himself first from Love and then from Fortune. “Half in dispeyre – not half, but clene dispeyrid, / I take my leue of Loue for onys and ay, / And of his seitfull, sotill hestis fayrid [deceitful, subtle promises embellished by eloquence],” the lover exclaims (6101-13), and this sudden reversal, after six thousand lines of professing his uninhibited submission to love, invokes the figure of almighty God and therefore principles of Christian morality: “But what, as this, almyghti God y pray / That no trew man be vexid in such wise / As y haue bene, for which ‘allas!’ y say, / ‘That evir y knew Loue or his servise!’” (6125-28). Likewise, he makes a move to extricate himself from the powers of Fortune (6420-47). These isolated moments of erotic repentance, sparse as they are, betray a subdued tension between erotic desires and the image of an impervious self the cycle appears to construct.

That this self-governance is embedded in the politics of identity can be further inferred from the lover’s allegorical dream that takes place shortly after his first lady’s death (2540-715).³⁵ In his dream he meets Age bringing him “wrytyng” from Nature who regrets that the lover is still under the control of Youth, who “hath thee gouernyd longe in nycete / Nought hauyng Resoun hit forto mesure” (2562-63). This points to a conflict between the poet’s youthful erotic desires and his older age, the

³⁵ I disagree with Spearing who argues that “the scope of this [dream] is social rather than political: love and its abandonment are issues that concern only Charles and his circle of acquaintances, and have no evident bearing on rule or the ruler’s self-fashioning” (“Dreams” 135).

latter associated with Reason, who “hath made a gret compleynt / Vnto Nature on the and thi may-
 stres / Of wrong doon” (2565-67). In an aging lover, in other words, reason needs to supplant and
 suppress passion. The solution, Age advises, is to abandon love and to embrace reason. What the
 lover should be concerned with primarily, however, is his public self: as Age urges him, “mayst thou
 now leve Loue to thyn *honeyre*” (2588, emphasis added). Any old lover loses his social esteem, but
 for Charles – a royal speaker like Mary – a loss of honour has dire consequences as it shatters the
 princely identity. Tellingly, much later in the cycle, when questioned by Venus in the second dream
 what his love was to him, he recollects: “For leuyr were me serue hir lo for nought / Then to ben kyng
 of al this world so round” (5149-50). Passion, in other words, is a threat to sovereignty. Age tells
 Charles to petition Love for release, to which Charles agrees, and the new self he imagines curiously
 resembles the restrained ideal which Buchanan and others tried to impose upon Mary, but which
 Mary’s own poetry spurned:

This shall y doon as now, what so bifalle,
 Withouten chaunge of other newe purpos:
 Even clene renounce here Louys werkis alle.
 Hit is tyme rest myn hert, y me suppos,
 To shette myn eyen and als myn eeris close
 And ordayne so that nevir shall
 Loue haue entre through Pleasere at all.
 I knowe the craft to wel me to forlose. (2660-67)

Closing his mind off to all pleasure for the sake of honour is supposed to liberate him from the prison
 of love. That resolution, however, is immediately followed by a caveat that “in this world me thought
 nothing, certayne, / So good as loue nor yet so honowrable” and that he has read that Love “hath, bi
 his might souereyne, / A wrecche ymade a lord – this hath ben seyne; / To many folke thus is he prof-
 itable” (2678-83). As the cycle unfolds, the lover fails to attain freedom from passion: after a brief

spell at the Castle of No Care, he resumes erotic longing, leaving the embryonic project of governing desires and pleasures through reason unfinished.

James, in contrast, not only attains physical freedom but leaves behind his allegorical prison as well, discovering a new royal identity that balances passion and morality. Preparing to reexamine his past and adumbrating his “aventure” in the opening stanzas of the *Kingis Quair*, James summarizes it as a movement from misfortune to bliss: Fortune “was first my fo / And eft my frend, and how I gat recure / Of my distresse” (66-68). He is also quick to link his earlier misadventures with a lack of self-rule that characterizes his youth: “Thou [sely] youth, of nature indegest, / Vnrypit fruyte with windis variable ... Thus stant thy confort in vnsekernesse, / And wantis it that suld thee *reule* and *gye*” (92-93, 99-100, emphasis added). That is, the thing he lacked to govern himself was reason: “I mene this by myself, as in partye. / Though nature gave me suffisance in youth, / The rypenesse of resoun lak[*it*] I / To gouerne with my will” (106-09). Therefore, his journey across a tempestuous sea and captivity become a Boethian allegory of his failings at self-governance. Love for the lady in the garden, through initially conceived in erotic terms (as the prolonged blazon [316-36] suggests), offers him a chance to correct his ways and to procure instruments of self-rule. When he appears before Venus and asks for a remedy against his unrequited love and political setbacks, she advises him to be patient and restrained: “therefore humily / Abyde and seue and lat Gude Hope the *gye*” (739-40). He is also asked to promote, upon his return to earth, the ideals of true and loyal love, and to “bid [folk] repent in tyme and mend thair lyf” (847), which simultaneously suggests that James needs to rectify his own behaviour: “And for your merit here, “ Venus says, “perpetualye / Ressaue I sall your saulis of my grace, / To live with me as goddis in this place” (859-61).

In order to accomplish this program, however, James needs to receive further instruction from Minerva, the goddess of Reason, who agrees to give him her “lore and disciplyne” (896):

As, gif thy lufe be sett all-uterly
Of nyce lust, thy trauail is in veyne.
And so the end sall turne of thy folye

To payne and repentance – lo, wate thou quhy?
Gif thee ne list on lufe thy vertew set,
Vertu sal be the cause of thy forfet.

Tak him [God] before in all thy governance,
That in his hand the stere has of you all,
And pray unto his hye purveyance
Thy lufe to gye. (898-907)

Passion has to be modified by reason and Christian ethics, such is Minerva's counsel to James. Following it, he changes the course of his fortunes and obtains not only freedom ("Eke quho may in this lyfe haue more plesance / Than cum to largesse from thralldom and peyene? – / And by the mene of Luffis ordinance" [1275-77]), but also happiness with his "hertis souereyne." By sticking to the laws of virtuous love and by way of rigorous emotional self-discipline that leads to maturity, James becomes the only lover among the three imprisoned monarchs discussed here who attains political and moral liberty.³⁶

The difference between the three monarchs then comes down to a disparity between what Foucault in the second volume of his *History of Sexuality* calls "the use of pleasure." Whereas all three royal speakers are expected to articulate a strategy of sovereign power vis-à-vis erotic desire, the regimes of the self they maintain are significantly removed from one another. The narrative Charles's desire produces, despite all its overt courtly conventionality and amorous imprisonment, contains an important motif of inner battle against desire, with its victories and losses, where "plesauce" is neither fully rejected nor wholly embraced, but the erotic self can only emerge through the process of conquering desire and yielding to it. For James, there exists a possibility of reasoned love which

³⁶ Cf., however, Clare F. James's reading of the poem, who argues that James's moral purification and liberation are a sham. Instead, she claims, the lover is shown to degrade himself into a beastly state of sexual appetite. At the end of this anti-Boethian poem patterned on the fall of Adam, the lover turns away from God and worships his lady above God.

channels sexuality, perhaps through the institution of marriage, into a regulated virtuous passion. The aim of self-governance is the Stoic ideal exemplified by the speaker. Finally, Mary is also an *exemplum*, but a negative one.³⁷ Rather than to attempt to balance desire and restraint, she makes pleasure the kingpin of her subjectivity. Her only goal is to experience pleasure with her beloved; everything that stands in the way of her desire is cast aside as *un-pleasure*. She complains, for example, of “[n]at being (to my displeasure) your wife as she [i.e. Bothwell’s wife]” (Rijj^r), and *Ane Detectioun* accuses her of endeavouring “to draw right, equitie, lawes, and customis of auncesters to hir awne onely becke and *pleasure*” (Jijj^r, emphasis added). Where James seeks to unite reason and passion, Mary rejects reason for the sake of unbridled passion, ignoring the threat that desire poses for her power and delving into uninhibited *aphrodisia*. In the context of the poetics of Scottish kingship, Mary’s sonnets are an antithesis to James’s poem.

That all three texts are so earnestly concerned with the questions of self-rule is hardly surprising, considering that they— as specimens of monarchical writing — are equally concerned with the questions of rule. Already in classical Greece we find a similar isomorphism between political governance and erotic self-control, a theory in which, Foucault argues, the virtue of private governance of passions has to reflect in the public governance of kingdom:

it is essential to understand that this virtue that functions as an example and a sign of superiority does not owe its political value simply to the fact that it is an honourable behaviour in everyone’s eyes. In reality, as far as the subjects are concerned, it reveals the form of relationship that the prince maintains with himself. This is an important political point because it is this relationship with the self that modulates and regulates the use the prince makes of the power he exercises over others. (*Use of Pleasures* 173).

³⁷ “Let the king constantly bear in mind, therefore,” writes Buchanan in *De Iure apud Scotos*, “that he stands on the world’s stage, set there to look upon, and that nothing he says or does can be hidden” (73). Failure to be a moral example for her subjects was obviously seen as another dereliction of duty by Mary.

Although the Christian texts of James, Charles, and Mary are almost two thousand years away from the ethics of classical civilization, the analogous regime of the ideal royal self they visualize betrays its fundamental importance to pre-modern European culture. Rhetorically and politically, self-rule is embedded in the concept of rule over others. Both Augustine's *City of God* and pseudo-Aquinas's *De regimine principum ad regem cypri (On Kingship)* turn to the political language of governance in their representations of control of reason over passion. Indeed, temperance – a classical Greek notion that was absorbed into Christian culture – is among the critical virtues, closely associated with honour, that medieval and early modern kings were expected to embody. As John Fortescue exclaims in *A Learned commendation*, “For who can be more myghty or more free then he that is hable to conquerer and subdue not onely others but also humselfe? Whiche thinge a kynge whose gouernaunce is politike can doo and euer doth” (99^f). Even James VI/I, despite his rejection of Buchanan's political theories, agrees in *Basilikon Doron* with his tutor on the importance of sovereign self-rule: “he cannot be thought worthy to rule and command others, that cannot rule and dantone his owne proper affections and vreasonable appetites;” rather than submit to his desires, the king has to impose the Law of God upon them: “beware ye wrest not the word [of God] to your owne appetite ... but by the contraries, frame all your affections, to follow precisely the rule there set downe.” Of the four cardinal virtues, James tells his son, “make one of them, which is Temperance, Queene of all the rest with you... that first commanding your selfe, shall as a Queene, command all the affections and passions of your minde” (*Political Writings* 12, 13, 43).

For the present discussion even more relevant is the reverberation between rule and self-rule that occurs in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. This text – both in the original and numerous translations, including through Chaucer's late fourteenth century *Boece* – not only provided a template for the poems of James and Charles but contained “many of the recurrent ideas and tactics for

prison writing in the West” (Zim 296).³⁸ It was also a conspicuous presence in Tudor England, where different Englished versions of it appeared in 1478, 1535, 1556, and 1609; and queen Elizabeth not only wrote a brief Boethian lyric (“O Fortune, thy wresting, wavering state”) while imprisoned at Woodstock from 1554 to 1555, but in 1593 completed her own translation of the *Consolatio*. As Deanne Williams has argued (“Boethius”), in pre-modern English culture Boethius became a text frequently adapted to theorize courtly and anti-courtly sentiment, functioning as advice to princes.

One of Lady Philosophy’s lessons touches directly on the threat emotional misrule poses to princely identity. As George Colville’s 1556 translation of *The boke of Boecius, called the comforte of philosophye, or wysedome* formulates it,

He that wylbe myghtie, must subdue and mayster his cruell desirs and appetytes, and may not put his necke vnder (as one ouercome) to the foule raygnes and libertye of lecherye or vicious mocions. Although thy power and authoritie extendeth so farre, as the grounde and contrey of India, trembleth and feareth the lawes, and commaun- dementes. And albeit, that the ferthest Isle in the sea called Thile, doth serue and obeye the: yet if thou cannest not put awaye the foule darke cares, and auoide wretched complaynts from the that do happen by euyll fortune, thy power is nothing, or thou hast no power at all worthy to be estemed. (Qij^v)

And should this awkward prose fail to catch the eye of the early modern reader, Wyatt’s poetic ver- sion published in Richard Tottel’s 1557 *Songes and Sonettes* offered a much pithier formulation of Boethius’s admonition:

If thou wilt mighty be, flee from the rage
Of cruell will, and see thou kepe thee free
From the foule yoke of sensuall bondage,
For though thyne empire stretche to Indian sea,

³⁸ For the influence of Boethius on the *Kingis Quair*, see Caretta; Ebin; Fuog; on Charles, N. Goodrich 190-92. See also Summers 12-18, 65-81, 101-06. For medieval English translations, see es- says in Minnis, *Chaucer’s Boece*.

And for thy feare trembleth the fardest Thylee,
If thy desire have over thee the power,
Subject then art thou and no governour. (122.1-7)

In order to govern others, one needs to govern oneself and especially one's passions; or as Tottel summarizes it in his title, "He ruleth not though he raigne over realms that is subject to his own lusts." It is clear that the harsh lessons of the *Consolatio* are not limited to the medieval poems of James and Charles – *Ane Detectioun's* attack on Mary as a pleasure-seeker, therefore, ultimately draws on a much more ancient tradition than has been so far realized. Although to my knowledge *The Consolation* has not been discussed in connection with Mary Stewart's imprisonment, its message to those in power underpins Buchanan's and Cecil's campaigns to disqualify Mary from rule, and few of those familiar with Boethius or Tottel's Wyatt would have missed the remarkable affinity between what the ancient writer spoke of and of what the modern queen was accused.

Wyatt's poem also leads us back to the complex dialectic of submission and disempowerment that, as I have shown, characterizes monarchical prison writing. The Boethian dictum, a monarch ruled by lust becomes a subject, strikes home for all the three monarchical poems, as the multiple pre-modern identities of the *Consolatio* – courtliness, Neo-Platonism, and politics – re-appear in the poems of James, Charles, and Mary. The Boethian analogy reintroduces the figure of imprisonment, for Boethius imagines yielding to desires in terms of incarceration: those who turn away from reason become "troubled with myscheuous affectes and passions, whereunto when they do come, and thereto consent, they do increase the bondage that they haue brought them self into. And they be in maner as prysoners, kept from their owne liberties" (Colville Bbiii^f). Yielding to desire and failing to rule one's appetites results not only in political debilitation, i.e. ineffective rule, but in a form of imprisonment. Elizabeth's version is even more persuasive as it fully explores the paradox embedded in Boethius's words: those who concede to the power of violent emotions, "are vexed with slaying affections which, increasing and agreeing unto, they he[l]p that bondage that to themselves they bring, and are in a sort captivated by their own liberty" (*Translations* 325). Here liberty itself, first of all emotional

and sexual, becomes the source of imprisonment (just as the yoke of reasoned love becomes a form of liberty in James's poem). Elizabeth's words of 1593 not only echo Fortescue's rhetorical paradox, but read as an implicit commentary on the tragic fate of Mary Stewart. Imprisonment by her own passion, let us recall, is what *Ane Detectioun* accuses her of when it claims that Mary's subjects "onely ... depriuit [her of] ... unbridelit licentiousnes of euil duing" (O^r).

For Boethius incarceration was a political and textual reality, however, not just a rhetorical figure. But so it was for James, Charles, and Mary. Consequently, in the texts that I discuss freedom and imprisonment evolve from abstract terms to vital categories of identity construction. Undoubtedly, the three texts espouse different scenarios of translating self-rule into political power, all deviating a significant distance from Boethius's original which proposes a total rejection of all passion. If the *Kingis Quair* "advocates love as an enriching quality for public office" (Martin 24; cf. Mapstone, "Kingship" 53) and insists on liberation through submission to reason, thus coming closest to embodying the Boethian teaching, Charles's book flirts with such an ideal but appears uncertain about the possibility of balance. Mary's sonnets contrast love and royal duty, ultimately sacrificing both self-governance and political governance for the experience of all-consuming and identity-shattering erotic pleasure from which she seeks no release. What remains constant, however, is the presence of a crucial connection between royal sexuality and royal power – imagined in terms of incarceration and liberty – across a wide spectrum of pre-modern monarchical love poetry.

In this regard, of the many aspects of sexuality given to governance one that takes on a crucial political significance in sovereign verse, and one that plays a particularly important role in the poems we discuss, is marriage – a form of "legalized passion" (see Fradenburg, *City* 84-90). James's liberation from prison is inextricably linked with his submission to "lufis yok that esy is and sure," to the "guerdown of all lufis space" (1346, 1347), which is traditionally taken to mean his anticipated marriage. Royal matrimony is inescapably an affair of the state, and historically, this may well be a reference to his political marriage to Englishwoman Joan Beaufort, probably one of the unofficial conditions of the king's release stipulated by the English. At the same time, royal marriage always

needs to be read allegorically: one of the precursors of James's poem is the biblical *Song of Songs*, one of the earliest articulations of sovereign love in Christian tradition. Solomon's song is an allegory of the union of Israel with God; it imagines the relationship of the people of Israel with God as a woman's love for her soon-to-be-husband, placing desire "simultaneously in the framework both of conjugality and of a fulfillment always set in the future" and making the pinnacle of its religious sentiment "its immediate passing over to a freedom that is regulated with erotic passion and rhetorical invention as had never been seen before" (Kristeva, *Tales of Love* 98, 100). The same, however, can be applied to James's allegorical poem: its anticipation of a Christian sovereign marriage ("a fulfillment set in the future") allegorically signifies Scotland's impending conjugal union with James after his release and return to the throne of Edinburgh.

This gives us tools for reading Mary's poems. Critics of the casket sonnets have not really commented upon the representations of marriage the poems contain; meanwhile, much of the drama of the casket sonnets arises from the speaker's acrimonious rivalry with her beloved's wife, with five out of eleven sonnets addressing the discrepancy in their connubial positions:

She for hyr honour oweth you obedience:
 I in obaying you may receive dishonour,
 Nat being (to my displesure) your wife as she.
 And yit in this point she shall have na preheminnence.
 Sche useth constancy for hyr awin profite:
 For it is na little honour to be maistres of your goodes,
 And I for luifing of you may receive blame,
 And will nat be overcumme by hyr in loyal observance. (Riij^o)

The beloved's wife enjoys the legitimate honour of marriage while the speaker laments her compromised, indeed dishonourable position as lover. Mary, however, questions the value ascribed to this marriage, offering her beloved illicit passion instead. The lines "Quhen you lovit hyr she usit coldnesse, / Gif you suffrith for hir luif passioun ... / Taking na pleasure of your vehement burning" (Ri-

ij^v) suggest the beloved's wife sexual frigidity, simultaneously implying that the speaker's uninhibited desire can fully match his "vehement burning." Jealous of her rival's married status, Mary considers herself "worthy of sic husband and Lord" (Rii^v), but the marriage she imagines for herself and her lover will be criminal, based on dishonour and blame. She wants to substitute for the "kinde society of mariage," as *Ane Detectiovn* puts it (Bii^j), the dishonourable deed of murdering her husband and divorcing Bothwell from his wife. In the wide context of monarchical writing, however, this coveted marriage, we must remember, also becomes a political allegory, a conjugal union in which the fate of Scotland is tightly interlocked with the ups and downs of Mary's sexual life. Unlike James who marries Scotland, Mary herself represents the country, wishing to marry her realm (which she herself embodies) to Bothwell, yet the allegorical charge of the marriage trope remains intact, despite the gender chiasmus. Mary's sexual body becomes Scotland, and her unlawful union with Bothwell exposes her kingdom to violation, rape, and dishonour.

The political metaphor of sovereign marriage was a vibrant – albeit at the same time precarious – part of early modern political discourse in both England and Scotland, despite Kantorowicz's claim that prior to James VI/I it was non-existent in England (223).³⁹ The very foundation of Tudor rule took place through matrimony because Henry VII's most legitimate claim to the throne was through his marriage to Elizabeth of York. Dedicating his *Vnion* (1548) to Edward VI, Edward Hall posits "the vnion of the noble houses of Lancaster and Yorke, conioyned together by the godly marriage of your moste noble grandfather, and your verteous grandmother" as the originary point of the Tudor dynasty: "as kyng henry the fourthe was the beginning and rote of the great discord and deuision; so was the godly matrimony, the final ende of all discencions, titles, and debates" (*ii^v). The following decade, in one of the versions of Elizabeth's 1559 speech to Parliament in which she answered the Common's petition that she marry, the queen is documented to have argued, "I am already bound onto a husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you." After that,

³⁹ On some implications of the marital metaphor in early modern political culture, see Curran 21-32; Jordan, "Household" and *Monarchies* 26-28; Ray esp. 13-25.

she is said to have showed them “the ring with which she was given in marriage and inaugurated to her kingdom in express and solemn terms” (*Collected Works* 59).⁴⁰

James VI/I, Mary and Darnley’s son, upon his ascension onto the English throne in 1603, addressing his first Parliament, employed the same marital metaphor to portray the bond between himself and his kingdom: “What God hath conjoyned then, let no man separate. I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawful wife” (*Political Writings* 136). James’s use of the trope – “a rehearsal of familiar metaphors put to new and strange uses” (McEachern 147-48) – is particularly illuminating. Religious and erotic, biblical and classical, legalistic and passionate, it at once echoes the medieval James’s reasoned love for his lady and for Scotland, and represents a dramatic reinstatement of sovereign marriage as a legitimate union between monarch and kingdom, a union in which the eroticism of passion has been restrained by the power of reason and law.⁴¹ James VI/I’s figurative construction proclaims him an heir to an important tradition of monarchical governance through self-governance. It simultaneously attempts, I would argue, to override whatever damage Mary’s discrediting of sovereign marriage may have done to the political imaginary of pre-modern Scotland and England, for the multifarious connotations of James’s words echo the poetic toils of his predecessors on the Scottish

⁴⁰ Although in the last years of her reign Elizabeth relinquished the rhetoric of marriage for self-presentation, focusing instead on the chastity and inviolability of her private and public bodies, the 1560s and 1570s were the decades when her literal marriage was still a possibility. On the significance of the politics and rhetoric of marriage for Elizabeth’s reign, see Curran 24-25; Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*; Levine.

⁴¹ James VI/I’s own love poetry provides an interesting parallel to the present argument. His early, and very brief, sequence of amorous poems written for a coterie audience is arranged, in one of the manuscripts, to provide a quasi-narrative parallel to James’s courtship of and marriage to Anne of Denmark. The poems themselves struggle to resist erotic pressures which jeopardize “free and absolute” sovereignty through various rhetorical strategies, such as, for example, an insidious misogyny and a censure of questionable marriages; the beloved and erotic desire (as well as a mother figure) represent a menace to the stability of the poet’s royal identity and are therefore (to be) “suppressed by the force of his discourse” (Goldberg, *James I* 25). Paradoxically, the lover is expected to avoid the prison of love. While it is impossible to claim that James’s love lyrics are haunted by Mary’s subversion of legitimate royal nuptials for the sake of illicit sexuality, the set of issues James is faced with is similar. As Dunnigan has phrased it, in James’s poetry “the formation of a political sovereign identity is constantly annulled or rendered fragile by the poetry’s own erotic pressures, and the giving of oneself up to the Other in the act of love” (81). On James’s poetic practice, see Dunnigan 77-104, esp. 81-91; Goldberg 17-28; Perry 21-23; Rickard; Sharpe, “King’s Writ” 123-31; also essays in Fischlin and Fortier.

throne, including his mother. Indeed, later in his reign James all but abandoned the marriage metaphor from his public discourse, and one can speculate whether James's "fundamental uncertainty as to what role the body and eroticism are supposed to play in the rhetoric of the Union" (Curran 28, *passim*) was due, at least in part, to the corrosive effects of Mary's profanation of sovereign marriage, rather than, as Kevin Curran argues, to the legacy of Elizabethan public rhetoric and various forms of political opposition to James's project of a British Union.

"O Goddis Have of me Compassioun:" Sovereignty and Divine Authority

In the poems of James and Charles the transformative experience of passion, which subjects the lovers to the will of their objects of desire, is also envisioned as submission to the pagan gods of love. Both princes have to negotiate an intricate network of relationships not only with their ladies, to whom they surrender by convention, but also with Cupid and Venus, to whom they likewise resign their authority by entering the gods' service. James pledges his loyalty to Cupid:

gif that he [Cupid]

Be lord, and as a god may lyue and regne,
To bynd and louse and maken thrallis free,
Than wold I pray his blisfull grace benigne
To hable me unto his service digne,
And euermore for to be one of tho
Him trewly for to serue in wele and wo. (267-73)

Shortly afterwards, having seen his lady in the garden, he immediately offers Venus "homage and sacrificise" and promises "to lyve vnder [her] law and do seruise" (359, 362). When he appears before her in his dream, he approaches her "febily ... / with my handis on bothe my kneis tueyne" (682-83); in return for her help with winning the lady, she requires that he "humily / Abyde [by] and serue" her

laws (739-40). Even upon his release he remains Venus's thrall, listing himself among "seruandis to lufe" (1284).

Similarly, in Charles's cycle Cupid and Venus feature as king and queen presiding over a court of love. As they announce in the opening patent, "the duke that folkis callse / Of Orlyauce, we him amytte and shall / As our servaunt" (5-7); and the duke willingly submits:

When in my hond was tan [taken] me this patent
I seide, "My lord, O very god puysshaunt,
Of pryncis prince, O prince most excellent,
For all the world is to yow obeyshaunt,
I, poore wrecche, bicomem yowre servaunt." (56-60)

Throughout the sequence, the speaker reiterates his "servying of his fayre and swete mastres," who is "the God of Loue, the lord souerayne" (921, 1865). Even after his request for release from Cupid's service is granted and his heart restored to him, Charles maintains his subjected status: "On knees downe y fell right humbly / To thankyn Loue the grace he hath me lent" (2902-03). The letter he writes to Cupid from the Castle of No Care opens with a most obeisant *salutatio*: "Most excellent, most high & nobil prince, / Most myghti king in eche rewm or province, / As humbly as that servaunt kan or may ... / So recomaunde y me, or more, to yow" (2984-86, 2989). Such appeals, as Coldiron writes, "place both the speaker and primary reader [i.e. lady] under the deity's jurisdiction, in this case creating a court-of-love dynamic in the poems and deposing the lady as sovereign addressee in favor of Cupid" (48). When in his second dream he encounters Venus – who "on hir hed lijk as a crowne ... were / Of dowfis white, and many a thousand payre" (4761-62) – he inquires whether he could offer her any service ("Haue y no service might be to yow fayne?" [4774]), and puts himself in her grace ("Madame, y putt me to yowre gras" [4796]). The only departure from this service is his regret that he submitted to the power of Love in Ballade 108 (6101-28), but the refrain, "Allas! That y am he / that evir y knew Loue or his servise," does not necessarily imply the lover's actual withdrawal from Cupid's service.

Against such vivid, palpable representations of Cupid and Venus it is easy to miss an analogous gesture the speaker makes in the casket sonnets. In a somewhat comparable move, Mary also opens her sequence with an address to gods, apostrophizing them in the first line, “O Goddis haue of me compassioun, / And shew quhat certaine profe / I may geif . . . / Of my loue and feruent affection” (Rij^v). Sarah Dunnigan notes that there is probably a blurring of pagan and Christian paradigms in the opening line, but she quickly dismisses it as “textual interference or corruption,” arguing that Mary addresses the holy Trinity (40-41). I would suggest, however, that Mary’s apostrophizing of classical gods (in the plural) is neither a slip of the pen nor merely a conventional classical invocation of the classical pantheon as a means to prop up one’s poetic authority. Rather, it registers the same concern about the ties between sexuality, divinity, and royal power traceable to the poems of James and Charles. A perfunctory political gesture that has gone virtually unnoticed (Dunnigan’s comment is the only one I have encountered), Mary’s entrusting of her erotic and political project into the hands of gods is connected to the erosion of sovereignty and the illegitimacy of desire in her poetry.

The Cupid and Venus in the two medieval texts open themselves to various hermeneutic constructions,⁴² and many of those are similarly pertinent to the casket sonnets. Undoubtedly, their primary function is to serve as the locus of the protagonists’ desire. Recycled through the *Romance of the Rose* and Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls* and *Troilus*, the classical Cupid and Venus supplied Chaucerian writers (such as James and Charles) with a powerful lexicon to represent a lover’s carnal concupiscence. Through acts of submission to the authority of the gods of love, the speakers place themselves within a framework of unrequited desire controlled by the prescribed codes of classical and medieval literary eros. In the context of the threat that sexuality poses to the stability of the sovereign self I discussed above, this submission simultaneously provides an excuse for succumbing to desire, transferring the responsibility from the speaker onto the deities. Also, the medieval Venuses themselves function not only as signs of sexuality, but as objects of desire as well. James find Venus

⁴² See Tinkle for a discussion of the multifarious meanings that Venus and Cupid accrue in medieval and early Renaissance culture, from virtuous love to corrupting sexual pleasure; she describes them as a “swarm of ambiguities” (34).

“vpon hir bed,” with her only clothes being a mantel: “A mantill cast ouer hir schuldris quite, – / Thus clothit was the goddesse of delyte” (670-72). Likewise, Charles’s Venus appears to him as a “lady nakid all thing saue hir here,” with only a “kerher of plesaunce” wrapped “abowt her wast” (4760, 4764). In this regard both authors follow their early medieval predecessors who pictured Venus naked “because she sends her admirers away stripped bare of virtue or because the crime of lust cannot be concealed” (Camille 99). The sexually alluring body of Venus captivates the speakers, further transforming them into subjects of erotic passion.

Although Mary’s “gods” are not specified, it stands to reason to identify them as the gods of love. They are, after all, called upon in order to guarantee to the beloved the vehemence and genuineness of the queen’s passion. Also, as Jane Kingsley-Smith has recently demonstrated (96-105), both in France and during her short-lived reign in Scotland Mary was repeatedly associated in public discourse with the figure of Cupid. Her jewelry and portraiture, masques she commissioned and partly penned herself, and courtly poetry written for her depicted Mary as closely associated with Cupid, initially controlling, but later controlled by his power. Kingsley-Smith does not discuss the casket sonnets, but conventions of the genre, that is, the French Petrarchism that Mary was schooled in, make Cupid and Venus the default deities of Mary’s love poetry. Simultaneously, Mary’s Catholicism makes such attribution all the more plausible, for in early modern England, as Kingsley-Smith argues (esp. 24-59), Cupid was an important element of the Catholic literary imaginary. In fact, Mary’s second sonnet is ambiguous as to whom it addresses. The speaker proclaims, “In his handis and in his full power, / I put my sonne, my honoure, and my lyif, / My contry, my subiects, my soul all subdewit, / To him.” But is it Bothwell, the speaker’s alleged beloved, as Buchanan and most of the subsequent readers believe, or is it one of the “goddis,” Cupid, to whose power Mary relinquishes her state and her subjects, sacrificing the political for the erotic, simultaneously asking the gods to secure her royal status? It is perhaps not accidental that *Ane Detectioun* compares Mary to “Medea, that is, a woman that nouthur in loue nor in hatrit can kepe any meane” (Gij^f), i.e. a classical character who resigns her selfhood to the powers love and passion, personified as the god of love Eros in the classi-

cal texts. Besides, labeling her as a tyrant, the authors of the pamphlet, probably inadvertently, may be alluding to Plato's *Republic*, where the "dictatorial man" is one "in whose soul dwells the tyrant Lust [Ἐρως] who directs everything" (573d).

Obviously, the iconography and ideology of literary Cupid and Venus changed from medieval to early modern (Hyde 29-110), but to look for differences between the representations of the classical gods in the writings of James and Charles on the one hand, and of Mary on the other would be to ignore vital similarities between the function of Cupid and Venus in their texts. As Jean Seznec's classical study *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* demonstrates, the Renaissance attitudes to the gods of Greeks and Romans were only marginally different from those of the Middle Ages, resorting to the same paradigms of physical, historical (euhemeristic), moral, and allegorical interpretations. Even the formal attributes of the gods, despite the rediscovery of a massive body of classical art in Renaissance Italy, were still largely derived from medieval iconography. The *Kingis Quair* and the duke's book are both late medieval texts, located at a curious threshold between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. On the one hand, there is a strong impulse to read the figures of Venus and Cupid in James and Charles as allegories of desire, as personifications of the speakers' internal passions, along the lines of the *Romance of the Rose*, which would characterize them as medieval. (Indeed in the casquet sonnets the speaker does not require a personification to express her subjective passion.) Along the same lines, in both texts Cupid and Venus are repeatedly deified, if in astrological terms: they are omniscient and omnipotent. While James cannot control his body, Venus not only knows all about him ("Yong man, the cause of all thyne inward sorowe / is nocht vnknawin to my deite" [729-30]), but can alter Fortune's attitude to him. Charles fails to recognize Venus whereas she is privy to his troubles and concerns ("Whi so?" quod she, 'dwelle ye not in No care?').

At the same time, neither medieval poem, accepting Cupid and Venus as fictive gods, registers what Thomas Hyde describes as "the medieval and early Renaissance worry about the status and dangers of this fiction." For him Renaissance poets are "less troubled by figurative divinity, less disposed to figure erotic obsession as idolatry or paganism, and less likely to accept moral responsibility

for readers who misunderstand or abuse their fictions” (73, 85), but neither James nor Charles displays any of the symptoms of the chary medieval approach to Cupid and Venus. In fact, in comparison with Chaucer, the two Chaucerian poems are markedly devoid of the uneasiness about the illicit pleasures of pagan culture that their poetic father freely admits.⁴³ Likewise, Charles’s figuration of Cupid and Venus as feudal lord and lady is a symptom of both the medievalizing approach to Cupid and of the waning of the middle ages, of a “society in which the categories of sacred and profane no longer seem distinct” (Camille 316). For that matter, Mary’s ambiguous “goddis” bear no traces of the playful, Anacreontic boy Cupid that becomes a stock figure of sixteenth-century love poetry, suggesting instead the darker, Petrarchan – in fact pre-Petrarchan – version of the god immersed in the feudal politics of domination and submission. Simultaneously nodding towards the medieval and prefiguring the early modern, the poems of James and Charles do not belong to a culture hopelessly and irrevocably severed from Mary’s, and the similarities that these three poems bear counter-balance, if not outweigh, the differences.

One such similarity between the medieval texts and the casket sonnets is their almost effortless transformation of paganism into Christianity. James’s Venus and Minerva both are skilled at tutoring him about ways of attaining Christian salvation (as Venus claims, “Worschip my law and my name magnify / That am your hevin and your paradise” [856-57]; “Bot gif the hert be groundit ferm and stable / In Goddis law, thy purpose to atteyne, / Thy labour is to me agreeable,” says Minerva, adding “‘Desire,’ quod sche, ‘I nyl it nocht deny / So thou it ground and set in Cristin wise” [960-62, 998-99]). In Charles’s cycle, Cupid is simultaneously a pagan and a Christian deity, “the God of Loue (the myghtty god)” (4325, cf. 1550). Charles’s beloved comes from the court of Cupid, yet he claims that “I trowe that God hath sent hir, Almyghty” (468), and prays for the soul of his dead lady in the “Chirche of Loue full solempnely” (2298). Similarly, Mary’s “goddis” at the end of the sequence become the one God: “O God turne abacke all vnhappy augure” (Si^f). Rather than allegorizing – Christianizing – interpretations of the classical gods typical of the earlier Middle Ages which betray suspi-

⁴³ On Chaucer’s attitudes to antiquity, see A. Cook; McCall; Minnis, *Pagan Antiquity*.

cion and uncertainty about the capacity of classical culture to articulate Christian truth, in all three texts these slips from one system of belief to the other imagine a hierarchical Neo-Platonic cosmos of the Renaissance where “the planetary gods, to whom the earth and the lives of men are subject, are themselves subject in turn. They are dependent upon a supreme will [of the Creator], of which they are merely the instruments” (Seznec 81).

In the context of our discussion of the various challenges to royal power that the texts of James, Charles, and Mary dramatize, submission to Christian divine authority by way of pagan belief becomes more than just an illustration of the pre-modern practices of adoption and adaptation of the classical lexicon for Christian ideology. Rather, it speaks to the complex relationship between divine and princely power explored in all three poems. Both medieval allegories award divinity a crucial role in sustaining the monarchs’ power *and* desire; and the casket sonnets reiterate this problematic by making the divine complicit in iniquitous royal eros. In other words, submission to the gods paradoxically reinforces royal authority. As Sally Mapstone remarks in her reading of the *Kingis Quair*, the poem conveys “a strong sense of the final sanction on monarchical power being a divine one” (“Kingship” 60), but the same can be argued about the royal texts of Charles and Mary. As a figure of monarchical prison writing, the appeal to the gods serves as a veiled reference to the divine authorization of sovereignty in an attempt to reverse the process of political, amorous, and textual capitulation.⁴⁴ Amid passions strong enough to undo the speakers’ royal identity and against the threat of im-

⁴⁴ For a useful overview of sacred kingship in medieval and pre-modern Europe, see Oakley 87-131. Although earlier accounts of the divine right of kings in England (Figgis; Kantorowicz) have been widely criticized as mistaking the legal fiction of the immortal royal office for a form of royal sacredness, the revisionist claims – such as that “the numinous kingship of the Holy Roman empire is really foreign to the main line of English political experience, notwithstanding occasional mystifiers, like John Busshy or James I, who may have attempted to introduce such ideas” (Hardin 24) – likewise require reconsideration. See, for example, McCoy’s *Alterations of State*, which discusses the transformations (but not extinction) of the divine right of kings theory in Reformation England. Even if we do not find kings who imagine themselves to be equal to gods prior to James VI/I, there is nonetheless a ubiquitous subscription to the notion that royal power is derived from God in medieval English political theory, from Wycliffe to Sir Thomas Smith. The kings themselves may not be sacred (see, however, M. Bloch’s *Royal Touch* for a classical study of the king’s sacred body in pre-modern France and England; and Bertelli’s *The King’s Body*, although his use of English materials is rather

prisonment and effacement, all three poems invoke multi-faceted gods as the last resort to reverse the sapping of princely authority that the texts perform. At the same time, in all three poems the gods can also be deduced to perform their other familiar function – that of the muses that ensure the success of the literary project whose purpose is to delineate a textual space in which the royal poetic self can negotiate its relationship with the oppositional forces – imprisonment and political subjugation, debilitating erotic desire, writerly disempowerment. As a result, in royal prison writing, poetry itself becomes the final prop for the princely identity that otherwise comes dangerously close to being undone.

* * *

If there is one thing to be learned from a reading that places the casket sonnets in a genealogical perspective, it is that their subjectivity can be traced to the medieval poems of James and Charles, and even further in time, to such foundational texts of the European literary culture as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. The casket sonnets and their paratexts were the first amorous poetic sequence circulating in English written by a Renaissance woman (cf. R. Smith 41), yet while the voice of a female Petrarchan sonneteer may have resounded in a vacuum, the love discourse of an imprisoned monarch invoked another tradition that guaranteed the sustainability of the subject of the casket sonnets. Placing them alongside the medieval prison poems of James and Charles helps us to discern in Mary's voice many of the elements that constitute the poetic identity of the medieval texts. Though it is impossible to trace any precise lines of influence of the medieval texts on Mary's writing, it is equally impossible to ignore the persistence of thematic and rhetorical forms that appear again and again in monarchical love poetry, especially in those texts that construct their subjectivity as emerging through the experience of incarceration. As the foregoing discussion suggests, the figure

limited), but their power is. In fact, none of the three poets I discuss makes a claim to sacralty, yet all three turn to divinity in order to preserve their imperiled selves.

of an imprisoned ruler is a recurring element of the pre-modern English literary imaginary; and the roots of this textual identity are scattered over a number of constitutive discourses – the poetry of erotic desire, political philosophy, neo-Stoic philosophy.

That it is indeed a distinct form of literary selfhood, replicable and sustainable outside the poems I have been discussing, is evident from its recurrence in the later English Renaissance. After the arrest, trial, and execution of king Charles I, a number of books in verse and prose circulated in Britain claiming to be written by – or in the voice of – the deposed monarch. Among them were *Eikon Basilike: The Pourtraiture of his sacred Majestie in his solitude and suffering* (1648), compiled by Dr. John Gauden, dean of Worcester; *The Divine Penetential Meditations and Vows of His Late Sacred Majestie in his Solitude at Holmby House, Faithfully Turned into Verse* (1649), claiming to be by Charles but now attributed to Edward Reynolds; and a handful of poems such as “His Majesties Complaint Occasioned by His Sufferings” (1647), “A Copie of Verses, Said to be Composed by His Majestie, Upon His First Imprisonment in the Isle of Wight” (1648), the Scots poem “King Charles’s Lament” (1650) and “Majesty in Misery; or, An Imploration to the King of Kings” (printed 1677).⁴⁵ Written in a different day and age, these texts nonetheless raise the same questions as, for example, the *Kingis Quair* and the casket sonnets: legitimacy of royal imprisonment and subjection, overthrow of normative power relations, royal martyrdom, unrequited desire (of liberty), and divine authority of kingship. Full of biblical, historical, philosophical, and intimate allusions, these texts, despite arising out of a specific historical and political situation, are engaged in a dialogue with the long tradition of monarchical prison writing in the English vernacular, opening themselves to interpretations that rely on a multitude of preceding literary and non-literary fictions, including those with which this chapter is concerned.

Even beyond the historical body of an imprisoned monarch, this poetic subjectivity remains a viable literary construction. *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, a sonnet sequence by Lady Mary Wroth appended to her prose romance *The Countesse of Mountgomerie Urania* (1621), is written in the voice

⁴⁵ See Herman, *Royal Poetrie* 196-208; Bertelli 258-61.

of Pamphilia, daughter of the king of Morea and later queen of Pamphilia herself. An example of fictional monarchical love poetry, the sequence writes its subjectivity in terms that we encounter already in James and Charles, and that can also be discovered in the casket sonnets. Sonnet XIV offers a particularly interesting example as it rehearses many of the familiar themes of the royal poetry of desire:

Am I thus conquer'd? have I lost the powers
That to withstand, which joy's to ruin mee?
Must I bee still while itt my strength devowres
And captive leads mee prisoner, bound, unfree?
Love first shall leave mens phant'sies to them free,
Desire shall quench loves flames, spring hate sweet showres,
Love shall loose all his darts, have sight, and see
His shame, and wishings hinder happy howres.
Why should we nott loves purblinde charmes resist?
Must wee bee servile, doing what hee list?
Noe, seeke some hoste too harbour thee: I flye
Thy babish tricks, and freedome doe professe;
But O my hurt makes my lost heart confesse
I love, and must: So farewell liberty.⁴⁶

Diverse discursive memories haunt Wroth's poem. It is undoubtedly a redeployment of much dated Petrarchan cliché in the context of Jacobean England, but as a vernacular piece of writing that voices unrequited sovereign love, it dramatizes the same conflicts that occupy the speakers in the poems of James, Charles, and Mary. Yielding to desire becomes a major political issue, and so does submission to the power of her beloved as well as to the personified god of love. By the same token, Pamphilia's prosthetic heart moves beyond its status of a well-tried signifier of passion and emerges as a symbol of her royal disempowerment. Finally, her erotic imprisonment is as much a *topos* of Petrarchan and

⁴⁶ I cite *Pamphilia* from Wroth, *Poems*.

post-Petrarchan love poetry as it is a crucial figure of not only Jacobean but in fact Tudor political discourse; and the use of the trope by a sovereign lover, if a fictional one, speaks again to its significance for the pre-modern English literary and political imaginary as well as to its longevity. There may be no direct intertextual links between the *Kingis Quair* and Charles's poems on the one hand, and the casket sonnets or *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* on the other, but the discursive system of representation remains intact from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century. Numerous points of reference between the medieval and the early modern texts indeed suggest that we are dealing here with a recognizable and re-inscribable form of textual subjectivity that exists in the pre-modern English vernacular and dictates its terms to those who write sovereign imprisonment and desire. Reading royal imprisonments, therefore, requires that we unravel the multiple threads of these various languages, from courtly love to Boethian morality to political philosophy, all of which contribute to the complex imaginative structure of royal captivity in pre-modern England.

Chapter Four

The Pathology of Affect in Shakespeare, Hoccleve, and Henryson

In the past three decades one of the most influential studies of Shakespeare's sonnets has been Joel Fineman's book *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* (1986). The volume's effect on Shakespearean studies is hard to overestimate. Regardless of their theoretical persuasions, critics writing in the post-Fineman era are forced to expound their position vis-à-vis Fineman's argument, which – despite its daunting intellectual provocativeness and rhetorical intricacy – can be boiled down to a claim that in his sonnets Shakespeare develops, out of the tired tradition of poetic praise, a “new poetics and, along with this, a new first person poetic posture” that has dominated Western literature until today (2). The sub-title of the book, *The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, captures the central thrust of Fineman's claim. As Michael Spiller rephrases it in his *Development of the Sonnet* published a decade after Fineman's book, “Shakespeare has created an /I/ markedly different from anything before him, which makes new demands on and uses of the sonnet” (155-56).

This insistence on the novelty and modernity of Shakespeare's poetic “I” makes his sonnets' position vis-à-vis their precursors ambivalent: while, Fineman writes, the poems “play themselves off against sonneteering conventions of such massive familiarity that they invite their readers to situate them within the context of specifically literary, laudatory commonplaces,” this invitation, he continues, “is immediately revoked” (*Eye* 244). This not only makes Shakespeare's sonnets seemingly oblivious of their literary antecedents, but appears to demand a similar Lethean sacrament on the part of the critics, often precluding reading Shakespeare's sonnets as part of either native or European tradition of pre-modern love poetry. As expected, this aspect of Fineman's argument has since been challenged by a number of scholars. Gordon Braden describes Fineman's knowledge of the preceding

tradition as “skimpy and secondhand” and argues that Shakespeare’s anti-Petrarchan moves are “not mockeries or refutations of Petrarchism, but fulfillments of some of the movement’s original potentialities” (“Shakespeare’s Petrarchism” 166, 171). In this Braden echoes a long strain of criticism, both pre- and post-dating Fineman’s book, that insists on Shakespeare’s numerous debts: to Petrarch’s own poetry (Cousins 111-42; Dubrow, *Echoes* 119-34; Roche 380-461; Strier 59-97); to the texts of Shakespeare’s classical and early modern continental precursors (Leishman esp. 27-68); and to his English counterparts, particularly Philip Sidney, from whose sonnets he “absorbed the fundamental assumptions about human nature which are new to English poetry in *Astrophil and Stella*” (Ferry 198, see 170-214). Dennis Kay (*Shakespeare* 96-106) likewise stresses the importance of various continental and English traditions, including medieval love poetry, for understanding Shakespeare’s sonnets.

In the present chapter I want to consider further possibilities for a rethinking of Fineman’s narrative. Specifically, taking my cue from the revisionary work of those scholars who emphasize the significance of Petrarchan pre-text for Shakespeare’s sonnets, I seek to qualify the claim that in his sonnet sequence “Shakespeare discovered a newly complex system of expression, unprecedented in Renaissance lyric” (Vendler 17). However, where scholars like Braden, Dubrow, Ferry, and Roche look to the continental and English Petrarchan models that provide referential frames for the articulation of Shakespeare’s poetic self, my interest lies in suggesting the relevance of a vernacular medieval subtext to Shakespeare’s sequence. Although investigations into the medieval strata of Shakespeare’s texts have become somewhat of a hot topic recently, critics who trace parallels between the medieval and the early modern rarely turn to Shakespeare’s non-dramatic poetry, much less the sonnets (thus tacitly reiterating Fineman’s position).¹ Focusing on Shakespeare’s representation of his desiring subject as afflicted with a mysterious disease of love, of Cupid and Venus – that is, venereal disease – I argue that some aspects of this self-representation have antecedents in medieval English poetry, namely, in *La Male Regle* by Thomas Hoccleve (1368-1450?) and *The Testament of Cresseid* by

¹ See essays in Perry and Watkins. With the exception of Christopher Warley’s essay on *A Lover’s Complaint* (“Fickle”) and Patrick Cheney’s discussion of “The Phoenix and the Turtle” (“Voice”), the rest of the volume is dedicated exclusively to Shakespeare’s dramatic works.

Robert Henryson (c. 1420-1500). While I do not suggest that either author should be included in the catalogue of Shakespeare's imaginary library,² I argue that both fifteenth-century poems contribute to the production of a vernacular poetic language that enables textual articulations of a sick amorous subject, and thus should be recognized in our readings of Shakespeare. This determines the retroactive dynamic of this chapter: I begin by looking at the Shakespearean subject of venereal disease, paying specific attention to the role of disease in the production of subjectivity, to the ethical aspects of the relationship between self and disease, and to the intersubjective dynamic of erotic sickness; and I then follow by considering the pre-figurations of this form of subjectivity in the medieval texts (Hoccleve and Henryson), stressing analogies as well as differences between the early modern and the medieval scenarios of producing poetic selfhood out of the sickness of desire and the desire of sickness.

“That Which Longer Nurseth the Disease:” Love, Sickness, and Identity in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Sonnet 147, one of the dark lady sonnets, offers a representative example of the Shakespearean subject's ontologically diseased condition:

My loue is as a feauer, longing still,
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserue the ill,
Th'vncertaine sicklie appetite to please:

² It is reasonable to assume that Shakespeare was familiar with Henryson's poem simply because it was printed among Chaucer's works in all early modern editions from Thynne (1532) to Speght (1598). That Shakespeare probably consulted it while working on *Troilus and Cressida* is derived from his negative attitude to Cressida largely absent from Chaucer's poem. See Apfelbaum 126; Donaldson 76-78; V. Smith; A. Thompson 121. Whether Hoccleve was known to Shakespeare is impossible to determine; while his works (except for the *Letter of Cupid*) were not printed in Renaissance England, there was a limited manuscript presence of some of his texts. As I mentioned in my introduction, the antiquarian John Stow owned copies of Hoccleve's *The Letter of Cupid*, *The Regiment of Princes*, and the *Series* (see A. S. G. Edwards). Knapp (11) cites William Browne's *Shepherd's Pipe* (1614) which includes a modified fragment of Hoccleve's *Series (Tale of Jonathas)* and identifies it as written by "Thomas Occleve, one of the priuy Seale."

My reason the Phisition to my loue,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept
Hath left me, and I desperate now approoue,
Desire is death, which Phisick did except.
Past cure I am, now Reason is past care,
And frantick madde with euer-more vnrest,
My thoughts and my discourse as mad mens are,
At randon from the truth vainly exprest.
For I haue sworne thee faire, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as darke as night.³

At the heart of the poem lies an extended simile that equates desire with disease (“my loue is as a feauer”), but while it is tempting to dismiss the sonnet’s rhetoric as a “gross expansion” on the tradition of “courtly-love conceits by which love or the beloved is likened to a disease” (Booth 398), Shakespeare’s deployment of medical language appears to be invested with greater urgency than, for example, the melancholic sonnets of Sidney and Spenser, both cited by Booth as instances of a more restrained approach to the trope. In Shakespeare’s sonnet 147 the disease of inordinate, unreasonable, indeed perverse desire constitutes the prop upon which the speaker’s subjectivity rests: the ambiguous syntax of the opening quatrain shifts the attributes of sensuous insatiability and its devouring effects back and forth, from the subject to the disease and then back to the subject, with his love fever longing for what causes and fuels the disease (“longing still / For that which longer nurseth the disease”), and the disease in turn nourishing itself on the subject who “doth preserue the ill.” The speaker desires more of the sickness as it pleases his “vncertaine sicklie appetite” and thus nurses and nourishes him (in other words, the disease feeds the speaker), but conversely, this same disease feeds *on* the speaker whose edible flesh guarantees the continuation of his sickness. The subject is complicit in his

³ All number and line references will be to Stephen Booth’s parallel edition of the 1609 quarto originals and modernized versions of Shakespeare’s sonnets (for obvious reasons I choose to quote the 1609 text). Commentaries are cited under Booth.

own malady: by consuming the disease he offers his own body to be eaten by it; the disease is both provider and parasite. The repetition of “longing . . . longer” also puts emphasis on indefinite perpetuation of the speaker’s morbid state, for what nurtures the subject of the poem is at once sustained by him. Indeed, despite the disturbing imagery of the second and third quatrains where the speaker’s disease is revealed to be incurable (“Phisition . . . hath left me;” “Past cure I am, Reason [the physician] is past care”) and is thus effectually equated with his existence, what is absent from the poem is any anticipation or fear of death that would terminate this uneasy symbiosis of subjectivity and sickness. Instead, the speaker cannot stop desiring and thus continues to be sick, but this sickness being terminal (“Desire is death”), the speaker will remain in a paradoxical state of desiring and dying. Rather than serve as a foundation for identity, to modify what I have said above, disease *becomes* the speaker’s identity. To love, for the subject of sonnet 147, is to live, but to love is also to be sick: consequently, to be for him is to be incurably ill.

The young man sonnets offer their own version of this paradoxical configuration of selfhood:

What potions haue I drunke of *Syren* teares
 Distil’d from *Lymbecks* foule as hell within,
 Applying feares to hopes, and hopes to feares,
 Still loosing when I saw my selfe to win?
 What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
 Whilst it hath thought it selfe so blessed neuer?
 How haue mine eies out of their *Spheares* been fitted
 In the distraction of this madding feuer?
 O benefit of ill, now I find true
 That better is, by euil still made better.
 And ruin’d loue, when it is built anew
 Growes fairer then at first, more strong, far greater.
 So I returne rebuked to my content,

And gaine by illis thrice more then I haue spent. (119)

The “madding feuer” which torments the speaker here is again associated with the incurable disease of love. Attempts, hopeful yet apprehensive (“hopes” are mixed with “fears”), to find remedy against this disease in “potions” of foul kind bring no results. Despite his best efforts at achieving health, the speaker remains sick. What is perhaps most striking about this sonnet is that it explicitly places the speaker’s self at the epicentre of a struggle between himself and the sickness that assails him. The stake in this conflict is the speaker’s own identity (“Still loosing when I saw my selfe to win”). The self is lost to the disease, but, uncannily, this “ill” state in which the speaker finds himself is welcome (“O benefit of ill, now I find true / That better is, by euil still made better”). In this twisted economy of passion, the benefit of disease is the threat it poses to the identity while raising the latter’s value for the speaker. Since it is erotic disease that configures the speaker’s identity, any accretion of the sickness paradoxically benefits the subject even as it diminishes him (“And gain by illis thrice more than I haue spent”). As in sonnet 147, to be devoured by this disease translates into being fed and sustained by it; and the poetic self emerges in the process of embracing the sickness that threatens the self with corruption: in the end he returns to his “content” of inordinate desire.

My synchronized reference to texts from the two sub-divisions of Shakespeare’s cycle, the young man (1-126) and the dark lady (127-54) sonnets, aims to draw attention to parallels between expressions of selfhood in both sets of poems (a point to which I shall return later) and thus emphasize the significance of the framework of disease for articulating subjectivity in the whole of Shakespeare’s sequence. Sonnets 119 and 147, investigating the self in a setting of incurable disease, delineate the latter as a crucial site for the awakening of selfhood. Disease calls the subject into existence by forcing him (or her) to admit his illness. The utterance, “I am sick,” is indeed one of the basic templates for constructing the self, for it is at a moment of outmost vulnerability that subjectivity can be most readily acknowledged. Shakespeare’s sonnets are invested in such articulating of identity at a point of acute bodily crisis, when the sense of self emerges in response to the forces that threaten to destroy it, as in “I ... in mine owne loues strength seeme to decay, / Ore-charg’d with burthen of

mine owne loues might” (23.5,7-8). In this poem the only use of the first-person pronoun “I” is coupled with a predicate that names debilitating erotic disease as the subject’s key attribute. It is when the body crumbles that the self becomes visible: loss turns out to be gain, decay turns out to be a form of (verbal) generation.

This highlights the paradoxical logic of how disease operates in Shakespeare’s sequence: the speaker celebrates his sick affective state as an ambivalent instrument that threatens to erode his body and self but, through this, catalyzes the emergence of subjectivity. As Heather Dubrow has argued, “[t]he primary formal and psychological patterns that we will discern in the speaker of the sonnets are versions of paradox” (*Captive* 170, also 192-202); and the discourse of disease and health in the sonnets offers ample evidence to validate this claim. It is therefore hardly surprising that the speaker’s relationship with his sickness takes the form of a courtly oxymoron, a figure in whose exquisite and daring paralogic two antithetical elements are conjoined in a mode of metonymic contiguity and metaphoric negation. In sonnet 119, we have seen, the lover’s “ill” is simultaneously his “benefit” and he is “by euil still made better,” “gain[ing] by illis thrice more then [he hath] spent” (9-10, 14). The benign impact the object of desire has on the speaker, in other words, with the promise to restore him to health, exists in a tight interlacement with its malignant counterpart, the object of desire that becomes the ultimate source of disease. A combination of paradoxical structure with medical terminology, meanwhile, transforms the oxymoronic object of desire in Shakespeare’s sonnets into a kind of *pharmakon*: cure that kills, poison that restores health.⁴

In sonnet 118, love is again venom and antidote, sickness and health:

Like as to make our appetites more keene
With eager compounds we our pallat vrge,
As to preuent our malladies vnseene,
We sicken to shun sicknesse when we purge.
Euen so being full of your neer cloying sweetnesse,

⁴ On the concept of *pharmakon*, see Derrida’s *Dissemination* 63-171, esp. 65-75, 95-105.

To bitter sawces did I frame my feeding;
 And sicke of wel-fare found a kind of meetnesse,
 To be diseas'd ere that there was true needing.
 Thus pollicie in loue t'anticipate
 The ills that were not[,] grew to faults assured,
 And brought to medicine a healthfull state
 Which ranke of goodnesse would by ill be cured.
 But thence I learne and find the lesson true,
 Drugs poyson him that so fell sicke of you.

Despite the labyrinthine syntax of the poem, the speaker's progress from "healthfull state" to "be[ing] diseas'd" appears quite uncomplicated, as does his motivation for choosing the "medicine" of "bitter sawces" over "wel-fare": according to the speaker, he decides to prevent prospective illness by subjecting his body to preventive medication ("by ill [to] be cured"). That his project of prophylactic sickening leads to disastrous consequences, for by the end of the poem the speaker finds himself genuinely diseased and "poyson[ed]" by the very medications he sought to stay healthy, can be explained away by the unhealthiness of the speaker's original logical supposition. According to Helen Vendler, he is already sick in seeking to damage his health: "How can one tire of well-being and goodness? How can one turn against them and seek out "diseased" loves?" she asks (501). However, the lover succumbs to illness despite his best intentions also through the beloved's ambivalent relationship with health and sickness. The beloved's original characteristic is "sweetnesse" (and arguably health), but as the poem progresses the lover realizes that it is his object of desire that makes him sick, describing himself in the end as one "that so fell sicke of you." From a locus of health to a locus of sickness, the beloved undertakes a kind of semantic somersault. It is also worth noting, however, that the beloved's initial sweetness is "neer cloying," where "neer" could mean both "ne'er" (never) and "near," marking the object of desire as a possible source of the speaker's disease earlier than the last line. The speaker's error was to believe that his passion for the beloved was a form of health, but the

text of the poem proves the supposition to have been false. The treatment he received was aimed at a healthy body whereas he, by way of his desire-as-sickness, was sick all along. The beloved then appears to be a source of sickness, not health. And yet, provided the original medical logic of the sonnet is sound (i.e. you can “sicken to shun sickness” and your illness can “by ill be cured”), the beloved simultaneously holds the power to cure the sick lover. In the sick logic of *pharmakon*, the object of desire is the source of both disease and health: it cures by killing, adds by subtracting.

This paradoxical relationship between disease and identity (i.e. the self is engendered by disease that simultaneously threatens to destroy it) acquires a more poignant quality in the context of early modern medical ideas. Renaissance medicine, it is widely recognized, took the self to be as much a physiological as a psychic construct, where “the whole interior of the body ... quite often involves itself in the production of the mental interior, of the individual’s private experience” and “the carnal and the spiritual [are brought] into frequent but highly unstable intimacy” (Maus 195-96). Or, to cite Michael Schoenfeldt’s generally accepted formulation from *Bodies and Selves*, in early modern culture, including Shakespeare, “bodily condition, subjective state, and psychological character are ... fully imbricated” so that “the purportedly immaterial subject is constituted as a profoundly material substance” (1, 10; see also Paster 1-24). But as sonnets 119 and 147 suggest, in Shakespeare the self, rather than simply being produced by the materiality of the flesh, comes into existence as a result of fleshly decay. It is the collapse of the body, of the material props of early modern identity (what Schoenfeldt calls “the physiological underpinnings of the parameters of psychological depth” [*Bodies* 76]) that triggers the birth of the Shakespearean subject even as it still points towards the subject’s imminent decay in the process of corporeal disintegration.

Embedded in this inordinate desire for what can destroy you is a disturbing ethical scenario of subjectivity that requires the perpetuation of affect in order to maintain the self’s existence – a scenario that can be described as pathological, for the ethical program of the sonnets seems to be “casting doubt on the existence of a strong distinction between “moral” and “immoral” realms” (Engle 186), asserting what Richard Strier has called “a self beyond morality” (85). The Shakespearean lover

acknowledges that his love is not only a form of incurable disease but a moral flaw as well (“Loue is my sinne, and thy deare vertue hate, / Hate of my sinne, grounded on sinfull louing” [142.1-2]), yet it does not compel him to correct his faults; instead, over and over in the course of the sequence the subject reiterates his commitment to the project of pathological affect, even at the expense of his own physical and ethical corruption: “All this the world well knowes yet none knowes well, / To shun the heauen that leads men to this hell,” he famously states in sonnet 129 “Th’expence of Spirit in a waste of shame” (13-14). In this poem the speaker imagines the work of sexual passion as “a horrific cycle of desire fulfillment and despair,” where consummation “does not lead to satisfaction but to feelings of shame, which do not, however, prevent him from seeking climax once again” (Hyland 171). Elsewhere, as we have seen, refusing to keep the advice of his physician Reason (147.5-7), the lover chooses to be “by euil still made better” (119.10) – that is, to explore the full spectrum of his erotic subjectivity by pushing the intensity of desire to its pathological limit. As Jyotsna Singh captures such “emotional regime” of Shakespeare’s sonnets, “[i]nstead of harnessing his feelings toward ethical or spiritual goals, the speaker seems to endlessly desire and yet defer consummation scenarios” (285). There does not appear to be an attempt to modify the vehemence of love or put a temporal limit to it in the sonnets: though there is a realization that the subject’s desire is perverse, there is no urge to renounce it or tame its ferocity, for it is this tremendous power of violent, indeed lethal, affect that opens, for a brief moment between sickness and death, the possibility of poetic self-articulation.

Sonnet 111 investigates the pathological ethics of the speaker’s intransigent desire:

O for my sake do you wish fortune chide,
The guiltie goddess of my harmfull deeds,
That did not better for my life prouide,
Than publick meanes which publick manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receiues a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu’d
To what it workes in, like the Dyers hand,

Pitty me then, and wish I were renu'de,
Whilst, like a willing pacient I will drinke
Potions of Eysel gainst my strong infection,
No bitternesse that I will bitter thinke,
Nor double pennance, to correct correction.
Pittie me then deare friend, and I assure yee,
Euen that your pittie is enough to cure mee.

The poem's significance comes from the parallels it draws between the immorality of crime and the criminality of passion. The first two quatrains implicate the speaker in the shame of wrongdoing, through references to "harmfull deeds" and the "brand" his name receives. Despite his attempts to deflect guilt onto Fortune ("the guiltie goddesse of my harmfull deeds"), the subject of the poem acknowledges the fact that his public persona is tarnished in ethical and legal terms. The third quatrain, however, marks a shift to medical vocabulary, imagining the speaker as "a willing pacient" drinking "[p]otions of Eysell gainst [his] strong infection," hoping to cure his disease. But the last line of the third quatrain returns the reader to moral and legal terminology ("Nor double pennance, to correct correction"), tying together criminality and sickness. At this point it is difficult not to read the speaker's metaphorical sickness as a form of legal and moral transgression, and vice versa. His love is both a disease and an unlawful act. The speaker promises to correct ("renue") both his crime and his sickness (although distinction between the two has become increasingly blurred), but this moral resolution turns out to be a sleight of hand. The lover wants to be cured – as well as morally corrected – by his friend's love ("Pittie me then deare friend, and I assure yee, / Euen that your pittie is enough to cure mee"), but it is this inordinate desire, we may recall, that is the original agent of the speaker's sickness. He is sick with, and guilty of, the fever of love, the distemper of desire, and yet he hopes to be cured by more of the same. The disease of love is a form of moral flaw that the subject of the poem

refuses to rectify. Rather than reject his pathologically affective state, he continues to persist in his passion, subverting the logic of morality and immorality.⁵

The pathological ethics of the sonnets thus calls for a reassessment of Schoenfeldt's influential argument that Shakespeare's sequence searches for the "ideal of the well-balanced self" and hails "the rational self-control of moderation" (*Bodies* 75, 90). Schoenfeldt reads Shakespeare's sonnets through early modern humoral medicine, which imagined passion as a kind of noxious disturbance among the four humours of the body and thus a form of somatic ailment which could be countered through emotional and dietary moderation.⁶ Accordingly, Schoenfeldt seeks to present Shakespeare's sonnets as an instance of "the early modern regime" of moral identity in which "it is unfettered emotion that is most to be feared" (*Bodies* 17), stressing affective discipline and suppression of emotion as the primary mechanisms of subject formation in Shakespeare. Recently, however, this position has come under fire for ignoring the fact that early modern culture sought different ways of accommodating passions, including those that promoted engaging strong emotions instead of suppressing them.⁷ Indeed, too many of Shakespeare's sonnets reiterate the inextricable ties between the speaker's subjectivity and his pathological, destructive affect. As I have suggested, the lover connects the very possibility of articulating his selfhood with the perpetuation of his sickly bodily appetites, of his contin-

⁵ Cf. Vendler 407, who argues that the use of alliteration suggests that the speaker is incurable.

⁶ For example, Thomas Wright's *Passions of the Minde in generall* (1604) envisions inordinate passion as illness: "if the passions of the Minde be not moderated according to reason (and that temperate virtue requireth) immediatly the soule is molested with some maladie," for "passions of the minde ... are certaine diseases of the soule" (17, 88). Metaphorically, inordinate passion is a form of moral disease because it threatens the quasi-Stoic ideal of emotional moderation; but as critics like Maus, Schoenfeldt (*Bodies*), and Paster remind us, for early modern medicine the humoral imbalance associated with excessive emotion was literally a bodily malady. Passions were psychophysiological phenomena, part of "the *fabric* of the body" (Paster 5).

⁷ See Tilmouth 1-36 for a discussion of several early modern theories that insist on the value of strong emotion, although Tilmouth's argument appears to go too far in the opposite direction, especially in linking the late seventeenth-century libertine aesthetics directly and teleologically with the early modern period. In his recent book, Richard Strier has also criticized Schoenfeldt, Paster, and "the new humoralism" in general for failing to acknowledge the Renaissance investment in passion, and thus for misrepresenting Shakespeare's attitude to desire in the sonnets (16-23, 75-97).

ued diseased state, not with a rejection thereof. Embracing excessive passion, the speaker makes pathological affect, not the impulse to counter it, the noxious foundation of identity.⁸

My extended attention to the tradition of reading disease in the sonnets as a form of humoral passion (in other words, through Galenic theories) is explained not only by the differences in interpreting the ethical aspect of the Shakespearean disease of love. Pre-modern Galenic medicine treated any disease as a form of bodily disturbance, which prompts Schoenfeldt to argue that in the sonnets “[e]ven venereal disease ... [is] imagined not as a contagious disease but rather as a moral and humoral imbalance” (*Bodies* 94). The problem with this claim, however, is that it ignores the intersubjective dynamic of disease evidently present in Shakespeare’s sequence. As I would suggest, the rhetoric of erotic sickness in Shakespeare’s sonnets implies the existence of mechanisms of malignant transference between the three major players: the speaker, his friend, and the dark lady. This erotic disease acts as a form of contagion that roams from individual to individual, violating and infecting every body it touches and rendering them all but indistinguishable in regard to their health. The disease of love in the sonnets, I argue, is more a matter of venereal transmission and less of individual moderation. Consequently, the threat disease poses to the speaker’s selfhood in Shakespeare’s sonnets is not limited to the erosion of the body; it also puts individual identity in question by eliding the category of difference between the subject and his objects of passion. In this regard, I suggest, reading the disease in the sonnets requires a different medical context than Galenic humoralism, namely, an engagement with early modern contagious diseases, especially syphilis.

⁸ Even sonnet 146, which Schoenfeldt claims “re-establish[es] a hierarchy between body and soul” (*Bodies* 77), is ambiguous about its ethical agenda. The speaker there exhorts his soul (“center of [his] sinfull earth” [1]) to “liue ... vpon thy seruants losse, / And let that pine to aggrauat thy store” and to “feed on death, that feeds on men, / And death once dead, ther’s no more dying then” (9-10, 13-14) – that is, apparently, to mortify the flesh in order to achieve spiritual growth. As we have seen in Sonnet 147, however, the death that facilitates the emergence of subjectivity is already at work in the speaker through his unreasonable love (“Desire is death,” with possible sexual innuendoes of orgasm), so his bodily death is brought about not by rigorous discipline of emotional abstinence but, instead, by a perpetuation of unbridled passion. In this light, the couplet not so much offers a Christian dictum on the mortality of flesh and the immortality of soul as it reiterates the inextricable ties between the speaker’s subjectivity and his pathological, destructive affect.

In all sonnets I have discussed so far the speaker, though he presents himself as suffering from a venereal disease, leaves the role of his objects of desire in this malady obscure (although in sonnet 118 he admits that he “so fell sicke of you”). In sonnet 137, however, his disease is portrayed as a result of intersubjective infection. Under the influence of the dark lady, the speaker’s “heart and eyes ... / ... to this false plague are ... now transferred” (137.13-14). Similarly, in sonnet 141 one of the lady’s many faults is that the desire for her has bought the speaker “plague” and “paine” (“Onely my plague thus farre I count my gaine, / That she that makes me sinne, awards me paine” [13-14]). Both are consequences of his sensual “sinne;” and the origin of his affliction in erotic interaction with his mistress makes his sufferings symptoms of the erotic disease he has contracted from her, for she is “a woman collour’d ill” (144.4) whose “eie loues brand new fired,” making the speaker sick (153.9).

Intimacy with the dark lady entails a possibility of erotic infection not only for the speaker but for his friend as well. In sonnet 133 the two men are simultaneously wounded by the dark lady: “Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groane / For that deepe wound it giues my friend and me,” the speaker exclaims (1-2). A cliché of courtly poetry (a melancholy wound) on the one hand, and an indelicate reference to “vagina” on the other, this “deepe wound” is also a sign of the lady’s power to violate the wholeness of the male lovers’ bodies (the sonnet goes on to mention “torture” and “torment” [3,8]), deforming them and ruining their health. Likewise, in sonnet 144, to which I will return shortly, the source of the young man’s (and possibly the speaker’s) disease is the dark lady: she “tempteth my better angel from my sight, / And would corrupt my saint to be a diuel / Wooing his purity with her fowle pride” (6-8). As Katherine Duncan-Jones glosses these lines, “there is ... a suggestion that the man will sooner or later be venereally infected by the woman” (*Sonnets* 404).

At the same time, the operations of “strong infection” in Shakespeare’s sequence cannot be confined to the heterosexual bond between the speaker and the dark lady, or that between her and the speaker’s friend. The love between the two males also harbours malicious transference. Although the poet never directly describes his male beloved as suffering from some sort of malady, he masterfully injects into the text suspicion about the young man’s health: in the beloved “all ill well shows”

(40.13), and “[i]f some suspect of ill maskt not thy show, / Then thou alone kingdomes of hearts shouldst owe” (70.13-14). In sonnet 67, the lover rails against Nature for keeping his object of passion in this world despite his sick condition: “Ah wherefore with infection should he liue” (1). This infection, like the speaker’s own sickness, is of course as much physical as it is emotional and ethical: later in the same sonnet the friend’s sickness is associated with “impietie” (2), “sinne” (3), and “false painting [to] immitate his cheeke” (5). The medical perspective that the opening line puts on the rest of the poem, however, in conjunction with a verbal resonance between this infection and the lover’s own (“like a willing pacient I will drinke / Potions of Eysel gainst my strong infection” [111.9-10]), makes the speaker and his beloved implicated, if only verbally, in each other’s disease. More explicitly, in sonnet 33 his male beloved is compared to the sun that not only hides his visage behind the “ougly rack” of “basest cloudes” (4-5) but is capable of contaminating the speaker: “Suns of the world may staine, when heauens sun staineth” (14). Sonnet 34 likewise represents the beloved as the source of erotic contagion: “Why didst thou promise such as beautious day / ... [but] let bace cloudes ore-take me in my way, / Hiding thy brau’ry in their rotten smoke[?]” (1,3-4). The lover’s repentance “heales the wound, [but] cures not the disgrace” (8). While the friend’s ability to “staine” his lover may be a social evil that “implicates [the] friend in the corruptions of their society” (Ferry 183; see also Cousins 143; Dubrow, *Captive* 255), in the context of the present discussion it can also be linked to the infectious spread of venereal disease (cf. M. Green 16-20). When in sonnet 114 the speaker confesses that his friend’s beauty is but a *trompe l’oeil* – which involves “mak[ing] of monsters, and things indigest, / Such cherubines as your sweet selfe resemble” and “flattry in my seeing / [That] my great minde most kingly drinks ... vp” (4-5, 9-10) – the liquid that the speaker’s eye prepares for his mind may turn out to be a form of “plague” (2) and “poison:” “If it be poison’d, tis the lesser sinne, / That mine eye loues it and doth first beginne” (13-14). The friend – like the dark lady – is imagined, in medical terms, as an exogenous pathogen that “stains,” “infects,” and “poisons” the speaker.

Conversely, sonnet 36 suggests that the traffic of pollution can go in the other direction: here the speaker is concerned lest his shame be transferred onto his beloved: “So shall those blots that do

with me remaine, / Without your helpe, by me be borne alone” (93-4), he admits, explaining that “I may not euer-more acknowledge thee / Least my bewailed guilt should do thee shame” (9-10). Of course Shakespeare’s language is pointedly ambiguous in these lines, mixing medical undertones (“blots”) with echoes of moral (“blots” and “shame”) and legal (“guilt”) discourses. As we have seen before, however, disease in the sonnets is never simply physical: it is almost always immoral and even criminal as well. Although this sonnet does not deal explicitly with sickness, it nonetheless implies that the speaker can somehow bestow his dangerous attributes of disease, guilt, and shame onto the beloved through an act of erotic communication, which is why intimacy between the lovers needs to be terminated (“Let me confesse that we two must be twaine” [1]). Likewise, in sonnet 72 the lover hopes that his death will prevent “shame” from being transferred onto his friend (“My name is buried where my body is, / And liue no more to shame nor me, nor you. / For I am shamd by that which I bring forth, / And so should you, to loue things nothing worth” [11-14]). Without admitting to being a full-fledged pathogen, the Shakespearean subject includes himself in the circle of erotic transmission that holds the three characters together.

The intersubjective dynamic of the sonnets is thus predicated upon the possibility of disease being transferred from one character to another: not only is the speaker in the grips of venereal disease, but so are his friend and, most likely, the dark lady. More importantly, the lady infects both male characters, the young man apparently threatens the speaker with erotic contamination, and the speaker himself appears likely to do the same to his male beloved. It is not accidental then that the sonnet that brings all three *personae* of Shakespeare’s sequence together in one text articulates the bonds between them in a language rich in medical overtones:

Two loues I haue of comfort and dispaire,
Which like two spirits do sugiest me still,
The better angell is a man right faire:
The worser spirit a woman collour’d il.
To win me soone to hell my femall euill,

Tempteth my better angel from my sight,
 And would corrupt my saint to be a diuel:
 Wooing his purity with her fowle pride.
 And whether that my angel be turn'd finde,
 Suspect I may, yet not directly tell,
 But being both from me both to each friend,
 I gesse one angel in an others hel.
 Yet this shall I neer know, but liue in doubt,
 Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (144)

The apparent semantic core of this sonnet is the clash between the young man ("the better angell") and the dark lady ("the worser spirit"). At a glance, the two objects of the speaker's desire appear to represent clear choices between "comfort" and "dispaire," "faire" and "il," "saint" and "diuel," "angell" and "finde," "purity" and "fowle pride," "good" and "bad." However, if "tempted" and "fired out" by the dark lady, the young man will be deprived of what at this point still distinguishes him from her, that is, his health, for both will be infected with the same disease. In fact, the possibility of the young man and the dark lady being rendered indistinguishable through an act of pathological intimacy is already verbally inscribed in the sonnet: both are referred to as "angel" and "spirit," and the aural and visual similarities between their seemingly antonymous epithets (such as "friend" and "finde," or "angell," "euill" and "diuel") already contain seeds of indistinction (cf. Vendler 605). The narrative event of the friend's corruption by the lady will merely confirm the expectations suggested by the linguistics structures of the sonnet. As Christopher Warley remarks, through the act of erotic tempting "the balanced structure of good versus evil, male versus female, confort versus despair, is radically undermined" (*Sonnet Sequences* 125; cf. Gil 109). Tellingly, the sonnet concludes with an expression of uncertainty about the roles the participants of this drama are playing ("Suspect I may, yet not directly tell ... / I gesse ... / Yet this shall I neer know, but liue in doubt" [10,12-13]).

Sonnet 144, I suggest, with its mechanism of infectious transference of erotic desire, problematizes what Fineman so memorably describes as the “generic, formal, and thematic” opposition between the “ideally homosexual desire” for the young man and the speaker’s love for “the loathsome heterosexual object” that is the dark lady (*Eye* 86, 58), which, despite a series of critiques by subsequent scholarship, continues to provide the principal framework for the study of the sonnets.⁹ As Valerie Traub writes, for example, “despite some gender ambiguity in modes of linguistic address, male and female *bodies* are cathected quite differently in these poems” (“Sex” 442). Fair enough, but at the same time the male and female bodies in Shakespeare’s sequence, insofar as they are represented as infected and infecting one another with venereal disease, eschew any clear-cut opposition along the lines of gender. In sonnets 119 and 147, the speaker conceptualizes his passion for the two objects of desire in almost identical terms: both attachments are pathological forms of “fe[a]uer” that consumes the speaker and makes him “madde.” In other poems, we have seen, both the dark lady and the young man can “poison” the speaker with “plague.” His objects of desire are hard to tell apart, for they are verbally aligned into a kind of androgynous “Master Mistris of [his] passion” (20.2).

But if we bring into the equation the fact that the speaker himself is afflicted with the same disease, attempts to contrast even the subject and his two objects (and not just the two objects of passion against one another) will become increasingly tricky. Verbal echoes between the speaker’s representations of himself and of his beloveds create a subtle network of associations that lies outside the diegetic temporality of the sequence, producing semantic connections that subvert the apparent plot-driving contrast between the lover and his beloveds. This web of recurring sounds, words, and images infecting one another creates a degree of identity between the three characters who otherwise appear

⁹ Dubrow has stressed the gender uncertainty of the first- and second-person pronouns in the sonnets, arguing that “[o]ften there is no way of being reasonably confident whether a given poem involves the Friend, the Dark Lady, or some third party” (“Politics” 116, also 119-20 and *Echoes* 122-23; see also Matz, *World* 14-15). Along the same lines, Douglas Trevor has argued that the sonnets’ preoccupation with poetry undermines the sharp gender binarism of the two objects of desire (“Love Objects” 225-41); whereas Michael Stapleton has suggested that both objects of Shakespeare’s love are feminine, one (the dark lady) grammatically and the other (the young man) rhetorically, for the latter is constructed as a parody of the Petrarchan sonnet lady.

to be torn apart by narrative events such as infidelity and rivalry. Symptomatically, the speaker uses similar metaphors to describe himself and his friend, especially when it comes to the images of physical or ethical corruption. The lover's decaying body is likened to a crumbling building in sonnet 146 ("Why so large cost hauing so short a lease, / Dost thou [i.e. soul] vpon thy fading masion [i.e. body] spend?" [5-6]), but in sonnet 95 the same trope is applied to the beloved: "Oh what a mansion haue those vices got, / Which for their habitation chose out thee, / Where beauties vaile doth couer euery blot [?]" (9-11). Thinking of the young man's inevitable death, the speaker invokes "lofty trees ... barren of leaues" (12.5); yet his self-portrait as a dying man rehearses the same figure: "That time of yeare thou maist in me behold, / When yellow leaues, or none, or few doe hange / Vpon those boughes which shake against the could, / Bare m'wd quiers, where late the sweet birds sang" (73.1-4). Both male lovers, we have seen, conceal "blots" (36.4 and 95.11) and carry "infection" (67.1 and 111.10). Analogously, the lover and his mistress are both "abhorrent" to others (150.11-12) and "for-sworne" (152.1-2) in their pathological love. Lastly, each of the three characters is at one point accused of "il[...]" or "euil" deeds: the speaker himself (90.2; 111.2; 121.12), his friend (34.14), and the dark lady (131.13; 150.6) are all guilty of some kind of ethical, social, or medical transgression.

The sequence thus displays three sick and mutually infectious bodies which, despite obvious gender and class differences, are also similar in terms of their health and contagiousness. Consequently, attending to the medical connotations of Shakespeare's vocabulary offers an important revision to Fineman's claim that Shakespeare's sequence displays a "unilaterally directed" (129) movement from a poetics of identification (and identity) in the young man sonnets to a poetics of difference in the dark lady sub-sequence. As Fineman writes, the tradition of poetic praise found in the first sub-division involves the speaker's (visual) identification with the ideal of his desire: "identification of praising subject with praised object is a staple in the repertoire of praise," to which "the young man sonnets seem ... profoundly loyal" (*Eye* 52, 53). By contrast, the dark lady sonnets embody the category (and poetry) of difference (in these poems the subject "identifies himself ... with that which resists, that which breaks, identification" [*Eye* 22]), insisting on a profound distinction between the

lover and his lady. From the point of view of infectious erotic sickness, however, all three characters display a certain degree of identity with one another (all three are, or will become, sick, and all three are capable of infecting one another with erotic malady), suspending the opposition of identity and difference. Similarity displaces alterity in pathogenic acts of erotic intimacy, eliding categorical distinctions between the lover and the beloveds, and further undermining the speaker's precariously unstable self already eroded by the disease. Venereal infection in Shakespeare's sonnets poses a double threat to the speaker: not only does it penetrate and consume the patient's body, but it also dissolves bulwarks of individual identitarian defense, such as gender and class. The speaker's desiring self is deprived of self-identity, transferred into the domains of his beloveds: "Me from my selfe thy cruell eye hath taken," he complains at one point (133.5), soon adding, "Doe I not thinke of thee when I forgot / Am of my self, all tyrant for thy sake" (149.3-4). The crucial distinction between self and Other is put at risk by this sickness.

This intersubjective aspect of erotic disease is the main reason why it is syphilis rather than humoral theory that proves more rewarding for explicating the particulars of the intimate interpersonal relationship premised on infectious desire in Shakespeare's sonnets. Although the rhetoric of erotic infection has a long history in Western amatory literature (for example, Ficino in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* refers to love as "amatory infection" not dissimilar from "itch, mange, leprosy, pneumonia, consumption, dysentery, pink-eye, and the plague" [162]), in Shakespeare's England figures of amatory contagion took on a more specific medical meaning. Syphilis first appeared in Europe in 1495, during Charles VIII of France's siege of Naples, when his soldiers became afflicted with a previously unknown malady; and it quickly spread throughout Europe, reaching England and Scotland by 1497 under the name of French disease, or pox. For at least two centuries it was one of the most universally feared diseases, rivaling and even replacing bubonic plague as the most virulent sickness visited upon mankind.¹⁰ It was also the first infectious disease categorized as venereal, or

¹⁰ On the history of syphilis in Renaissance Europe, see Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French; Foa; Quétel 9-72; Tognotti; and essays in Siena, *Sins*. On syphilis in early modern England, see Fab-

morbus venereus (see Healy 136), for as early as the sixteenth century syphilis was linked to sexual intercourse; and this discursive connection opened vast opportunities for Petrarchan poets like Shakespeare to explore the figural as well as the literal dimensions of erotic sickness.¹¹

The poems that most explicitly identify the Shakespearean speaker's condition as the French disease are sonnets 153 and 154. In 153, the poet describes the healing effects of a "seething bath" that was created when Cupid's "loue-kindling fire" was steeped in "a cold vallie-fontaine" by a maid of Diana's (1-7); the resulting hot well promises "[a]gainst strang malladies a soueraigne cure" (8). The speaker is afflicted with such malady and hopes to find remedy in the water blessed by Cupid's brand, but his journey is in vain ("I sick withall the helpe of bath desired / And thether hied a sad distemperd guest. / But found no cure, the bath for my help lies" [11-13]). In sonnet 154 the speaker reiterates that the well in which Cupid's "heart inflaming brand" (2) was dipped by a Nymph has since become "a bath, and healthfull remedy, / For men diseasd" (11-12), but the curative effect of this bath has failed to restore the speaker's health: "I my Mistrisse thrall, / Came there for cure and this by that I proue, / Loues fire heates the water, water cooles not loue" (12-14). As various commentators have noted, not only was Cupid's burning shaft associated with syphilitic infection in early modern England (Kingsley-Smith 72-74), but the poet here is likely describing one of the commonest methods of treating syphilis: the use of sweating baths in which early modern venereal patients sought relief from their suffering (Booth 533-34; Fabricius 140; Schoenfeldt, *Bodies* 79).

The blunt directness of sonnets 153 and 154 retroactively provides a referential frame for the preceding poems, inviting the reader to revisit earlier poetic figures in the new light. The rhetoric of the erotic malady that afflicts the speaker and his beloveds is indeed partial to the early modern medical and cultural vocabulary of syphilis. "Fe[a]uer," for example, was part of the rhetorical construc-

ricius 57-83; Healy 123-51.

¹¹ From early on syphilis was connected to sex and interpreted, in moral terms, as God's "scourge to the people for whordness," as in Peter Lowe writes in his 1596 treatise *An Easie, Certaine, and Perfect Method, to Cure and Preuent the Spanish Sicknes* (B1^v). The ethical undercurrent of syphilography thus offers an instructive parallel to Shakespeare's metaphoric representation of his sickness of extreme affect as a moral transgression.

tion of the French disease. Willyam Bulleyn in his *Boke of Compoundes* (1562) claims that by many the disease “would faine bee called, but a feuer” (xlviif).¹² Analogously, the “plague” the speaker contracts from his mistress is not just a generic affliction but one of the early modern ways to designate the French disease (Healy 124; Kingsley-Smith 72), one purportedly used by Shakespeare himself in his plays.¹³ The mistress is thus not only the origin of the speaker’s erotic malady but possibly the source of syphilitic infection, especially considering that she is insistently described as “foul” (127.6; 132.14; 137.12; 144.8; 148.14). Syphilis was often characterized as a “foul” disease, for example, in John Hester’s 1594 *A Pearle of Practise* (liii^f), in the 1533 English translations of van Hutten’s *De Morbo Galico* (2^v), and in the chapter on syphilis in the 1634 edition of Ambroise Paré’s *Workes* (726). Likewise, the speaker’s accusing his mistress of black “deeds” (131.13; 150.6) – as well as confessing to his own “harmfull deeds” (111.2) which “the world is bent ... to crosse” (90.2) and invoking his friend’s “ill deeds” (34.14) – may conceal a reference to syphilitic pustules which were occasionally referred to as “evil” or “black deeds:” “[t]he deed euyl,” Johannes de Vigo writes in his discussion of the pox in *Excellent Workes of Chirurgerye* (English trans. 1543), “is a maligne, filthy, and corrupt scabbe” (CLxiiii^f). The identification of the lady as infected with syphilis is supported by her being touted as a prostitute (she is “the baye where all men ride” [137.6] who “[r]obd others beds reuenues of their rents” [142.8]), a member of the group held primarily responsible for the spread of syphilis in Renaissance Europe (Fabricius 104-46; Healy 139-51; Siena, “Pollution” 555-62).

Indeed, in blaming the presence of venereal infection in the body of the speaker (and his friend as well) on the lady (through images of “plague,” “pain,” “tempting,” and “firing”), Shakespeare is attuned to the gender politics of early modern syphilis. As scholars have shown, in a heterosexual act that led to infection the culpability was commonly assigned to the female partner, who was

¹² See, however, Roychoudhury, who argues that the “feuer” of sonnet 147 is a specific disease unrelated to other forms of illness in the sonnets.

¹³ On the reading of plague as pox in Shakespeare’s plays, especially *Timon of Athens*, see Bentley 139-213. For a counter-argument that “plague” in *Timon* is a signifier of plague, see Totaro 87-108. On the discourse of plague in pre-modern England see E. B. Gilman; Healy 50-122; on cross-pollination between the discourses of plague and syphilis, Fabricius 138-39; Grigsby *passim*.

imagined as the active infector (Siena, "Pollution" esp. 557; Schleiner, "Infection" 502-06). This is not to say that male-to-female contagion was unknown to pre-modern medicine. According to Paré,

Whether the man or woman have their privies troubled with virulent ulcers, ... the malignity catcheth hold of the other; thus woman taketh this disease by a man casting it into her hot, open and moist wombe; but a man taketh it from a woman, which, for example sake, hath some small while before received the virulent seed of a whore-master polluted with this disease, the mucous sanies whereof remaining in the wrinkles of the womans wombe, may be drawne in by the pores of the standing and open yard, whence succede maligne ulcers, and a virulent stragury." (724)

For the most part, however, physicians prefer to stress the woman's vile role in the act of contagion, claiming that the source of syphilitic infection lies in the female body (even Paré's description is more graphic when it concerns female-to-male transmission). For von Hutten, the French disease "resteth in [women's] secrete places, hauynge in those places lyttell pretty sores full of venemus poyson, beinge very daungerous for those that vnknowyngly medle with them. The whiche syckenes gotten by such infected women, is so moch the more vehement and greuous, howe moche they be inwardely poluted and corrupted" (5^v). Hermanus in *An Excellent Treatise Teaching howe to Cure the French-pockes* (English trans. 1590) claims that "thys foule disease" is spread "through companying with women, where through the secret parts are first infected" (A1^r). Peter Lowe *An Easie, Certaine, and Perfect Method, to Cure and Preuent the Spanish Sicknes* (1596) believes that "this maladie proceedeth cheefely from the act of *Venus*, whe[n] men haue to doe with women polluted with that infection" (B2^r). De Vigo reiterates the same attitude to the role of women: "Thys dysease is contagious, chiefly yf it chaunce through copulation of a man wyth an vnclene woman ... by hauynge knowledge of filthy, vnclene, and pocky women" (CIx^{r-v}). If the disease that ravages the characters of Shakespeare's sequence is indeed the French pox, it should not be surprising that Shakespeare's dark lady is endowed with the dangerous qualities of infectious disease. The misogyny of the sonnets is a fact

noted and investigated by critics,¹⁴ but it can also be linked to the gynophobia and antifeminism of early modern venerological discourse.

The rhetoric of some of the young man sonnets, however, also suggests the French disease, especially in the canker imagery of several poems (35, 70, 94, 95). Symptomatically, in sonnet 94 this canker is metaphorized as the product of infectious disease: “if that flower with base infection meete,
/ The basest weed out-braues his dignity” (11-12). The figure of “canker” was often conflated with the syphilitic “chancre.” In William Clowes’s *Brief and Necessary Treatise, Touching the Cure of the Disease Called Morbus Gallicus, or Lues Venerea, by Vntions and Other Approoued Waies of Curing* (1585) one reads: “any outwarde partes, being once infected, the disease immediately entreth into the bloud, and so creepeth on lyke a Canker, from parte to parte” (4^r); and Lowe similarly refers to “vicers and cankers” as signs of *morbus venereus* (E1^v). The “poison” that the speaker’s beloved prepares for him (114.13) was also a routine way to refer to the French disease in English: von Hutten (5^v), Lowe (B2^v), and Hermanus (A1^r), among many, use “venim” and “poyson” and their derivatives to characterize the pox.¹⁵

I have focused on the syphilitic overtones of Shakespeare’s vocabulary of disease in the sonnets not because I am interested in diagnosing Shakespeare,¹⁶ but because the culturally determined rhetoric and iconography of the pox provides one of the languages in which Shakespeare in the sonnets articulates his poetic subject in relation to the pathogenic objects of desire. We have already seen

¹⁴ On the misogyny of Shakespeare’s sonnets, see de Grazia; Matz, *World* 11-52; Sedgwick 28-47; Traub, “Sex.” However, see Schwartz, “Will in Overplus,” who argues that Shakespeare’s sonnets in fact unsettle rather than propound the misogynistic ideology to which they refer.

¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that even though in Shakespeare’s sequence contagion (“staining”) seems to take place between the speaker and the young man (sonnets 33 and 34), the poet still appears to be in need of a female figure in order to introduce infectious desire in the sequence. Kenneth Borris in *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance* cites as the earliest example of documented same-sex male venereal transmission John Marten’s *A Treatise of All the Degrees and Symptoms of the Venereal Disease* (1704), and speculates that even in the early eighteenth century “the possibility of same-sex transmission [of pox] was still questioned” (154). Shakespeare’s decision to locate the explicit source of infection in the dark lady, in comparison to hinted suggestions of the circulation of infection between the male lovers, is therefore justified by medical and cultural tradition.

¹⁶ Fabricius cautiously suggests the presence of syphilis in Shakespeare’s circle, if not in the poet’s body (178-87); and a recent medical study (J. J. Ross) asserts that even if Shakespeare was not infected with the pox, he likely had undergone, perhaps erroneously, mercurial treatment.

that erotic malady endangers the speaker's selfhood by eating away the body and destroying the self's corporeal foundations.¹⁷ The intersubjective aspect of this malady, however, further exposes the vulnerability of diseased selfhood because it threatens to erase distinctions between his self and the objects of his affection, young man and dark lady; and this dynamic of punctured selfhood in the sonnets, when difference becomes identity, I would like to argue, closely mimics the French disease.

What made syphilis markedly different from all known diseases, especially during the first century of the infection's circulation in Europe, was its extreme contagiousness. According to Clowes, syphilis was easily contracted "by eating and drinking with infected persons ... some time by lying in the bed with them, or by lying in the sheetes after them ... by sitting on the same stoole of easement, where some infected person frequenteth. Sometymes ... by wearing their infected clothes (3^v). A similar argument occurs, almost word by word, in Borde's *Breuiary of Helthe* (lxxxxvi^v); whereas Lowe claims that he has known "diuers to haue been infected onely by kissing, of which number I haue healed one in Paris, who was infected onely by kissing a young Gentleman a sutor of hers, who had Vlcers in his throat, proceeding from the same disease" (B2^r). The crucial insight to be gained from these semi-anecdotal claims is the anxiety over the uncanny power of the new disease to erode the boundaries of an individual body and thus, considering the importance of the material underpinning of identity in the early modern period, to put individual subjects at risk. Plague was as contagious, but it swept through wide territories indiscriminately infecting and killing large masses of people (Grigsby 58), whereas the horror of syphilis resided in its mysteriously selective nature and its focus upon the individual sick body and its power to infiltrate other bodies and spread the disease

¹⁷ Early modern syphilography also illuminates my earlier observations regarding the economy of consumption that regulates the relationship between self and disease in sonnets 119 and 147. Early modern doctors routinely portrayed the French pox as steadily devouring the patient's body. For Girolamo Fracastoro, the disease "does not openly betray itself as soon as it has been received within a body, but it lies hid for a fixed period and gradually gains strength by feeding" (*Syphilis* 55). William Clowes notes that *Morbus Gallicus* "corrupteth the blood, and *poisoneth the whole bodie*, and breedeth in the parts thereof, paines or aches, vlcers, nodes, and foule scabbes, with corruption of the bones" (4^{r-v}, emphasis added); and Johannes de Vigo argues that if the original "pustules could not be healed by medicine applyed within or without," eventually they "would *embrace the whole bodye*" (Cix^r, emphasis added). In these formulations, the French disease, like Shakespeare's erotic fever, feeds on the patients' bodies as it gradually subsumes their identities.

there. Syphilis both produced individual subjects and effaced distinctions between them. With the French disease the borders separating one subject from another became porous and feeble, for one could become infected not only through close physical contact (such as penetrative sexual acts), but through “an impure touch or contagion . . . or as by breathing only” (Paré 724). Consequently, the spread of syphilis represented a massive challenge to Galenism and resulted in the emergence of a new scientific framework in which “the body’s porousness was being increasingly reconfigured as a disconcerting vulnerability to illicit invasion by venomous pathogens” (Harris 26).¹⁸

While it is not clear to what extent Shakespeare was familiar with these scientific developments (cf. Hoeniger 189-90), the medical context of the early modern French disease can give new weight to my argument regarding the elision of difference in the sequence as a result of erotic malady. In Shakespeare’s sonnets venereal disease functions primarily as a seed of contagion which, infecting the speaker, his mistress, and his friend, looks to wipe out many of the distinctions between them. Indeed contagion, Thomas Lodge remarks in his *Treatise of the Plague* (1603), “is an euil qualitie in a bodie, communicated vnto an other by touch, engendring one of the same disposition in him to whom it is communicated. So as be that is first of all attained or rauished with such a qualitie, is called contagious and infected” (B2^v). An infectious disease, this passage suggests, is about sameness, not difference: contagion imputes disease into healthy bodies, making them indistinguishable from sick ones. In this regard, the “plague” that afflicts the Shakespearean subject in the sonnets (whether it is a reference to bubonic plague, syphilis, or some generic malady) conforms to the intersubjective scenario of early modern contagion: being “transferred” into this disease results in the speaker’s assimilation with the object of desire. In acts of pathogenic intimacy, the difference between individual

¹⁸ Although late medieval understandings of leprosy implied rudimentary concepts of contagion that anticipate our microbiological model (Pantin; Rawcliffe 90-95), and although many medical writers still considered an absence of proper regiment the underlying cause of infection, it is when faced with the problem of syphilis that Fracastoro (in *De Contagione*) and Paracelsus developed their theories of exogenous contagion, in which diseases such as plague and syphilis were imagined to be carried around by invisible seeds that penetrated the external parts of the body. On Fracastoro’s theory see Nutton 21-33; on Paracelsus, see Pagel esp. 134-40.

identities yields to a form of sameness.¹⁹ Yet, that the disease of love in Shakespeare's sonnets is a product of infection circulating between the three agents of desire is critical to the framework of precarious subjectivity the sequence constructs. Paradoxically, embracing this contagious disease, while still threatening to the subject, also facilitates a self-conscious analysis of the limits and foundations of identity that constitute so much of the subject matter of Shakespeare's sonnets. The power of venereal infection to undo individual identity leads to a sharper demarcation of identitarian contours, producing one of the most poignant forms of subjectivity known in Western poetry.

At the same time, the possibility that the sonnets are informed by the historically specific vocabulary of the French disease should not obscure the fact that throughout the sequence Shakespeare's language of disease remains first and foremost figurative. Discerning the rhetoric of syphilis in Shakespeare's sonnets merely reinforces my earlier observations regarding the vicissitudes of pathological desire in the sonnets, not alters them, for the sick amorous subject of Shakespeare's sequence remains a poetic, not medical construction. As a poet whose desiring and speaking subject is configured by erotic sickness, Shakespeare is part of a vernacular tradition that links the emergence of subjectivity to moments of health crisis; and my aim in the rest of this chapter is to qualify the trope of "invention of subjectivity" in the sonnets by suggesting the existence of a vernacular genealogy behind the imaginative resources of Shakespeare's poetry. Two medieval poets, Thomas Hoccleve and Robert Henryson, I suggest, pre-figure the articulations of diseased erotic selfhood in Shakespeare's sequence. Although in different ways, their poems represent desire as a form of disease, articulate the paradoxical relationship between self and illness, investigate the problematic of identity and difference in amatory poetry, and explore the complex gender dynamic of erotic sickness, with its

¹⁹ In her reading of Shakespeare's sonnets, Margreta de Grazia argues that the real threat of the sequence is associated with gynerasty and the desire for the dark lady which, through her voracious and indiscriminate sexuality, imperils social distinction and leads to social miscegenation, in contrast to the desire for the young man which preservew the stability of social identities (103-06). Given that in its contagiousness syphilis was a "democratic" disease ravaging all social strata (Bentley 109; Boehrer 200), subverting the stability of the demarcation lines separating one subject from another (such as class and gender), one might add to de Grazia's argument that the dark lady's venereally infectious body is one of the weapons through which social categories can be placed under erasure.

powerful mechanisms of pathological intimacy. In what follows I consider the lessons these medieval sick lovers can teach us about early modern poetry.

The “Penylees Maladie” of Thomas Hoccleve

Pre-dating Shakespeare’s sonnets by almost two centuries, Hoccleve’s poems dealing with disease and health also investigate the anxieties of a lyric speaker whose pathological desire at once poisons and recuperates his subjectivity. Hoccleve was a career bureaucrat, serving for several decades as a clerk in the Office of the Privy Seal (c. 1388-1424), who deployed his poems primarily as a means to secure some form of patronage.²⁰ Yet in his early begging poem *La Male Regle* (circa 1405-06) and in his lyric *Complaint* composed some twenty years later as part of a poetic sequence currently known as the *Series* (circa 1420-26), he is also the creator of a unique poetic identity in which the interiority of morbid selfhood is scrutinized against the social bonds of desire, gender, and class.²¹ Although produced in a literary and political milieu drastically different from those of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England, like Shakespeare’s sonnets Hoccleve’s poems deploy the discourse of disease, with its repertoire of sufferings and remedies and its gamut of sensations of unease and reassurance, as the primary vocabulary for articulating identity – identity emerging out of the desire for an object that possesses both noxious and beneficial characteristics for the subject.

In light of recent adjustments in the tone of Hocclevean criticism, away from celebrations of the individualizing autobiographical element in his poetry and towards investigations of the formulaic constructedness of Hoccleve’s literary self, from *person* to *persona* as it were,²² in this section I read

²⁰ On Hoccleve’s biography see Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve*; Mitchell 1-19.

²¹ All parenthetical references to line numbers of Hoccleve’s works will be to Hoccleve, “*Complainte*” and *Other Poems*.

²² It is instructive to compare earlier claims, such as that “Hoccleve’s originality in his autobiographical verse lies in the personal colouring which he lends to traditional forms” and his “introspective tendency [that] appears to anticipate the Renaissance” (Thornley 296; cf. Bryan 176-203), with more recent arguments that his autobiographical persona is a poetic device “shaped by a literary tradition” (Simpson, “Madness” 16; see also Greetham), or else a product of the social and cultural forces of Lancastrian England. As Larry Scanlon has succinctly phrased it, “[Hoccleve’s] autobiographical

La Male Regle (with brief references to *My Complaint*) not as a localized document of their creator's life but rather as a poetic utterance that contributes to the production of a vernacular textual identity in which disease and desire are intertwined. By shifting my focus from production to productivity, however, from the cultural and historical forces that shaped Hoccleve's identity to the shaping force of his own textual self, my reading, I hope, can help in reclaiming the enduring legacy of the Hocclevean poetics of disease for early modern literary studies as a productive model of poetic discourse.

La Male Regle is an occasional text. It is a written petition addressed to Thomas Neville, Lord Fournivall, the historical treasurer of the exchequer, citing financial troubles and requesting payment of the annuity due to the poet. It wittily although quite accurately captures the historical circumstances in which Hoccleve found himself when Henry IV's government had suspended payments of annuities for 1404-05 and did not restore them until 1406 (Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve* 11-16). That the actual addressee of the poem is Lord Fournivall and the speaker a clerk in dire straits, however, does not become apparent until the very the end of this 448-line poem, when the speaker bluntly states, "Lo, lat my lord the Fournival, I preye, / My noble lord that now tresoreer, / From thyn hy-nesse haue a tokne or tweye / To paie me that due is for this yeer" (417-20). Rather, most of the text imitates the discourse of a sick man addressing Lord Health and supplicating the latter to restore the speaker to well-being:

O precious tresor incomparable!

O ground and roote of prosperitee!

O excellent richesse commendable

turns are decidedly not the expressions of some unitary private self in a pre-social or pre-ideological state. They are continually framed both by his position at court as a Clerk of the Privy Seal, and by the traditions he draws upon to articulate them" (*Narrative* 300). In a similar move, Ethan Knapp in his suggestively entitled book *The Bureaucratic Muse* investigates Hoccleve's use of the formulaic bureaucratic practices for expressing his individuality; in Knapp's phrase, in his poems (especially the *Series*) we find "rather than chronicling the recovery of a personal voice ... [but] the dispersal of that voice into the textual world of the Privy Seal" (160). For other attempts to find a middle ground and to suggest that in Hoccleve individual identity and autobiographical specificity are inevitably expressed through a set of conventional stylistic, formal, and thematic resources available to writers, see Burrow, "Autobiographical Poetry;" Classen, "Autobiographical Voice."

Abouen all that in eerthe be!
Who may susteene thyn aduersitee?
What wight may him auante of worldly welthe,
But if he fully stande in grace of thee,
Eerthely god, piler of lyf, thow helthe? (1-8)

Despite near-parodic accumulation of economic vocabulary in just eight lines (“precious tresor,” “prosperitee,” “richesse” “welthe”), the opening stanza does not anticipate a historically specific reference to Hoccleve’s financial troubles. At this point, the “richesse” the speaker extols is largely metaphorical. It is true that as the poem unfolds the connection between bodily and pecuniary well-being, between health and wealth, becomes more and more pronounced. The speaker claims that he is stripped naked by “force of this penylees maladie” (130) and his “purse” is “bare” (200); his “seeknesse,” he explains, is “[a]s wel of purs as body” (337-38). The poem, the speaker remarks shortly before conclusion, is a product of an interlacement between bodily sickness and monetary hardships: “A, nay, my poore purs and peynes stronge / Had artid [compelled] me speke as I spoken haue” (395-96). He is sick because he lacks money. And yet, for the first 416 lines (which include a confession of tavern sins [56-200] and a diatribe against flattery [201-88]), until the explicit reference to Lord Fournvall that abruptly changes the register of the text, the figures of wealth and prosperity, despite their suggestiveness, remain just those – verbal resources deployed as ornament in order to enhance the illocutionary power of the speaker’s petition to the god of health. The language of economic exchange is omnipresent in the poem, but its figurative status defies attempts at disambiguation through a reduction to biographical referentiality. If the historical occasion of the poem makes us aware of the literal significance of “welthe,” the text itself is less forthcoming about its rhetorical mode.

Indeed, up until the moment Hoccleve’s extra-textual circumstances are uncovered, the poem constructs its speaker as a sufferer of disease seeking remedy from Lord Health:

Whil thy power and excellent vigour,
As was plesant vnto thy worthynesse,

Regned in me, and was my gouvernour,
 Than was I wel, tho [then] felte I no duresse.
 Tho farsid [filled] was I with hertes gladnesse.
 And now my body empty is, and bare
 Of ioie and ful of seekly heuynesse,
 Al poore of ese and ryche of euel fare. (9-16)

The antithetical parallel structures (“bare ... of ioie”/“full of seekly heuynesse;” “poore of ese”/“ryche of euel fare”) do rely on economic language, but their primary thrust is to portray the speaker as one who endures physical torment. Whatever his pecuniary worries, he is first and foremost physically sick: “My grief and bisy smert cotidian / So me labouren and tormenten sore,” the speaker admits (25-26), adding that “[t]he keene assautes of [health’s] aduersarie / Me wole oppresse with hir violence” (58-59), so his “carkeis is replete with heuynesse” (350). His is a “penylees maladie” (130), and “[t]he literal sickness of the body and metaphorical sickness of purse are intricately interwoven from beginning to end” (Spearing, *Medieval* 118). Both members in the phrase are of equal weight: the rhetoric of disease cannot be dismissed as simply ancillary to the economic discourse, for both are metaphorized through their interlacement.

One could list many points of dissimilarity between the worlds of *La Male Regle* and Shakespeare’s sonnets, including the former’s narrative emphasis, its comic tone, a bureaucratic rather than theatrical setting, or the difference in the rhetorical mode of illness. At the same time, in many important aspects Hoccleve’s fiction of selfhood parallels that of Shakespeare’s sonnets. To begin with, the self in *La Male Regle* is conceptualized in terms of disease and health. Symptoms of the speaker’s bodily deterioration are not merely textual gimmicks aimed at individuating the speaker, but his very identity is inextricably tied to his affliction. As he pitifully exclaims, “I ... of my ignorance, / Vnto sicknesse am knyht” (21-22). This image of coupling by way of knitting suggests that the speaker’s selfhood and his malady are one. In addition, the very act of enunciation in *La Male Regle* presupposes disease as the critical configuration of identity: a desperate plea of a sick man is addressed to

Lord Health; and this situation carries an implication that the main reason for uttering the text is the speaker's unsound condition. But once the suit is granted and he is restored to health, the need for poetic petition will dissipate, and the subject of the poem will cease to exist. In other words, the textual position of *La Male Regle* is sustained exclusively by disease in the sense that if the subject's desire of health is granted, textual production – that is, “knitting” (from Latin *textus* [fabric]) – will be terminated. Hoccleve's self is so tightly knit into the fabric of the poem that its subject is only viable as long as he is sick – or as long as the poem lasts, for the moment he stops being sick, silence will ensue. The disease is the fundamental condition of Hoccleve's poetic utterance.

Further, like Shakespeare's sonnets, *La Male Regle* draws attention to the crucial role disease plays in the process of writing subjectivity. On the one hand, illness is an obvious threat to the speaker's identity because it endangers the self's existence. On the other, however, the menace disease posits to one's self results in an acute experience of subjectivity, with the self emerging out of a threat of erasure. Shakespeare's sickness, I argued, engenders subjectivity by eroding the material underpinnings of identity. By contrast, Hoccleve's sickness in *La Male Regle*, although manifesting itself in physical sufferings, is largely social: when a man is afflicted with “penylees maladie,” the speaker complains, “[h]is name is deed. Men keep hir mowthes cloos, / As not a peny had he spent tofore” (347-48). Disease isolates its bearer, consigning him to a kind of symbolic death through disappearance of his name and his identity from public discourse. (Yet it is important to recall that in Shakespeare sickness is likewise associated with the social stigma of shame.) In both cases, however, the outcome is similar, for illness creates an environment in which subjectivity becomes increasingly difficult to preserve. At the same time, in Hoccleve as in Shakespeare writing under the authority of disease leads towards a radical self-interrogation about the limits and foundations of one's identity. Having confessed his sins and performed his diatribe against flattery, the speaker of *La Male Regle* returns to the central issue of the poetics of disease by asking a question that is likewise pivotal to the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets, “Ey, *what is me*, that to myself thus longe / Clappid haue I. I trowe that I raue. / A, nay, my poore purs and peynes stronge / Han artid [compelled] me speke as I spoken

haue” (393-96, emphasis added). Hoccleve’s sickness is in effect paradoxical: disease can destroy the subject, but it also isolates him and forces him to investigate his self, engendering a poetic text where identity is precariously fragile and yet painfully palpable to both writer and reader.

In order to illustrate further my point that in Hoccleve it is the mechanism of disease that renders the poet’s self so graphically concrete and yet so precariously unstable, I want to turn briefly to his *Complaint*. The poem was written around 1419-21 in the wake of his severe mental breakdown, most likely of psychotic kind, which he suffered five years prior, around 1414-16 (Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve* 22).²³ Although the circumstances of the speaker’s sickness and the nature of the affliction itself are different, the latter being mental or psychosomatic rather than purely somatic as in *La Male Regle* (this time he describes himself as “brainseke” [129]), the impact of the disease on his identity is remarkably similar. *My Complaint* presents its subject as one who suffered from “thoughtful maladie” in the past and now recalls how he “with siknesse last / Was scourged” (21-23). The problem is, many people still do not believe that he has been cured and shun him (“For though that my wit were hoom come againe, / Men wolde it not so vndirstonde or take. / With me to dele hadden they disdein” [64-66]), and the speaker undertakes to write a text that would persuade everyone that he is sane and his self is still recognizable as his own. This economy of disease, like that in *La Male Regle*, makes the speaker’s identity the highest stake in the game. He is isolated from society by his sickness (e.g. “A riotous persone I was and forsake. / Min oolde frendshipe was al ouershake. / No wight with me list make daliaunce” [67-9]; “as I had lost my tunges keie, / Kepte me cloos” [144-45]), but the threat of disease is not exclusively social. The self not only becomes vulnerable but is in fact forfeited altogether in the state of degrading malady: his disease, he claims, quite in line with what we have seen in our discussion of pre-modern melancholy, “me oute myselfe caste and threwe” (42). In a frequently quoted passage from *My Complaint*, the speaker finds himself alone in his chamber, painfully looking at himself in the mirror for signs of identitarian integrity in the hope to locate his unchanged self:

²³ On Hoccleve’s representation of his madness, see also Doob 208-31; Feder 98-109; Goldie; MacLennan 18-23; Simpson “Madness.”

And in my chaumbre at home whanne that I was
Myselpe alone I in this wise wrought.
I streite vnto my mirroure and my glas,
To loke howe that me of my chere thought,
If any other were it than it ought. (155-55)

Claiming that he has been cured, Hoccleve's speaker thus insists, "This troublly liif hath al to long endured. / Not haue I wist hou in my skyn to tourne. / But nowe myself to myself haue ensured" (302-04). The opposite of sickness is a whole self rather than one usurped and ravished by disease.

What is striking about this scenario of subjectivity is that such elaborate textual articulations of identity seem to be tightly connected with the threat posed by sickness. Just as we have seen in Shakespeare's sonnets, in *My Compleinte* even as disease erodes one's identity it highlights its value, or as George MacLennan formulates this paradox, "[t]he self-loss of madness is the precondition of Thomas's act of self-inspection" (21). As I would like to suggest, this claim can be detached from the discussion of madness and extended to the poetics of disease in general. Hoccleve himself does not seem to differentiate verbally between the somatic malady of *La Male Regle* and the mental disease of the *Series*. Not only does he describe in *My Complaint* his condition as "siknesse" (22, 284, 381), "grief" (29), "infirmite" (40), "greuous venim" (234), and "dissese" (388), he introduces it as a punishment from Almighty God who "[v]isiteth folke alday, as men may se, / With los of good and *bodily sikeness*, / And among other he forgat not me" (37-39, emphasis added). Besides, in accord with pre-modern humoural psychology his psychic disturbance opens a somatic dimension: "haue I be sore sette on fire / And lyued in greet turment and martire" (62-63). Whether Hoccleve's poem provides sufficient evidence that he is indeed recovered is open to discussion; according to a critic, "Hoccleve attempts to authorize a stable self but instead writes a fragmented and incoherent identity, one characterized by illness instead of integrity" (Goldie 23; see also Knapp 166-67). What matters, however, is that Hoccleve's poem constructs a self afflicted with sickness and thus imperiled, divorced from itself. Like the sonnets, *My Complaint* subscribes to the same logic of disease: intensifying the poet's

sense of the self, it undermines the very principles upon which this self is built, producing a poignant but ultimately insecure and transient form of subjectivity.

The brief prologue to *My Complaint* (1-35) also serves as a graphic reminder that Hoccleve and Shakespeare arguably belong to the same rhetorical and poetic culture, an important notion frequently obscured in equal shares by our ideas of Shakespeare's modernity on the one hand, and of Hoccleve's belated Chaucerianism on the other. Meanwhile, the poetic vocabulary Hoccleve builds up in the English vernacular in the early fifteenth century is very much alive in the time of Shakespeare. The opening stanza of Hoccleve's *Complaint* paints a vivid picture of autumnal decay:

Afir that heruest inned had hise sheues,
And that the broun sesoun of Mihelmesse
Was come, and gan the trees robbe of her leues,
That grene had ben and in lusty freishenesse,
And hem into colour of yelownesse
Had died and doun throwen vndirfoote,
That chaunge sanke into myn herte roote. (1-7)

Perhaps the stanza is a negative invocation of the opening lines of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but such a Chaucerian reading largely ignores the fact that, like *La Male Regle*, Hoccleve's *Complaint* is written in the voice of a sick subject. Rather than merely a Chaucerian allusion or a reference to a specific time of the year (both of which they undoubtedly are), these lines are a metaphor of the speaker's decaying health. His infirmity is mirrored in the image of nature progressing towards a death of winter; just as trees are "robbe[d]" of their leaves by the advancing season, the tree or plant of the speaker's body (the figure is suggested by the use of "roote" to describe his heart) degenerates. Indeed as the reader soon discovers, the speaker is afflicted with a "maladie." Shakespeare, however, as we have seen, likewise metaphorizes bodily disintegration (either through disease or old age) through images of nature, comparing fall and winter to disease and summer, to health: "That time of yeare thou maist in me behold, / When yellow leaues, or none, or few doe hange / Vpon those

boughes which shake against the cloud" (73.1-3). The third quatrain ("In me thou seest the glowing of such fire ... / Consum'd with that which it was nurrisht by" [9, 12]) returns us to the disease of love that at once destroys and sustains the speaker, linking desire and decay in the master trope of erotic malady. A similar effect is achieved in sonnet 97, where the beloved's presence is compared to summer whereas in the absence of the object of desire (and health) the speaker finds himself in the grip of winter: "How like a Winter hath my absence beene / From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting yeare? / What freezing's haue I felt, what darke daies seene?" (1-3). I am far from arguing that Hoccleve's lines are any kind of conscious intertext for the sonnets; what I am suggesting instead is that this similarity between poetic subjects and the rhetorical strategies they use to articulate themselves speaks to the existence of a common discursive formation between Chaucer and Shakespeare which functions as a repository of textual identities that can be re-deployed by subsequent poets. In other words, Shakespeare, despite tectonic shifts in language and culture from the early fifteenth to the late sixteenth centuries, still relies on medieval poetic phraseology to express his early modern anxieties and desires.

Returning again to *La Male Regle*, another parallel to Shakespeare's sonnets can be found in the questionable ethical dimension of disease in this poem. On the surface, the two texts seem to represent incompatible rhetorical treatments of sickness. For Shakespeare, his inordinate passion *is* the disease while in Hoccleve's poem disease is a consequence of what he insistently calls his "misreule" (90, 290), failure to regulate his body and its appetites. That is, in the sonnets disease is largely metaphorical while in *La Male Regle* it is primarily metonymic. But in other aspects the operations of disease in the two texts are remarkably similar. Hoccleve's physical sufferings are caused by somatic intemperance, for excessive eating and drinking at London taverns are at the root of his malady. It is, the speaker confesses, "[t]he custume of my replete abstinence, / My greedy mowth, receite of swich outrage, / And hondes two" (113-15) that have brought him to this pitiful state and made him "mirour ... of riot and excesse" (330). Although the speaker protests profusely that "[o]f loues aart touched I no deel" (153), it is not impossible to imagine that some kind of *morbis venereus* is distressing his

body as well (Tolmie, “Professional” 363), especially given the lengths he goes to in order to convince the reader he is not guilty of the carnal sin and free from its consequences (137-60). (The innocent clerk protests too much, so to speak.) Besides, visiting taverns and lewd houses may eventually lead to an empty purse, just as lack of funds does not help one’s health (as the poet says in the final lines, “By coyn, I gete may swich medicine / As may myn hurtes all, that me greeue, / Exyle cleene, and void me of pyne” [446-48]), which further exacerbates his “penylees maladie.” In fact, Hoccleve’s affliction may be closer to Shakespeare’s disease of unregulated emotion than it appears. His misrule is caused by his youthful rejection of reason: “As for the more paart, youth is rebel / Vnto reson, and hatith hir doctrine ... O yowth, allas, why wilt thou nat enclyne, / And vnto reuled resoun bowe thee [?]” (65-66, 69-70). Failure to follow reason leads to indulging one’s unhealthy appetites (“I take haue of hem bothe [ete and drynke] outrageously, / And out of tyme” [109-10]) and, consequently, to disease of the body and the purse.

As the speaker admits, his misrule is a sin (he refers to it as “my folie” [40] and “my offense” [57]), for in abandoning the dictates of reason the speaker lost the ability to “discerne a vertu from a vice” (100). The poem itself is a form of “mock-penance” (Bryant 181), where the speaker constructs his interiority by confessing the sins that have led to his infirmity (which constitutes another point of correspondence between the poetic voice of Hoccleve and Shakespeare). “Allas, that euere knyght I was and cheyned / To excesse, or him did obedience” (343-44), he exclaims, suggesting that he seeks reformation and embraces abstinence, making a negative *exemplum* of his past behaviour. But, he admits, his sickness “[a]s wel of purs as body, hath refreynd / [Him] from tauerne and other wantonnesse” (338-39) – that is, his disease of an empty purse has kept him safe from the temptations of taverns and lewd houses. Paradoxically, his somatic and financial disease is a form of moral health. Therefore, a restoration of his financial well-being will likely lead to further excess and, in turn, disease. As Robert Meyer-Lee has noted, for the speaker of *La Male Regle* money is “both the vehicle and cure of his ‘misreule’” (“Apprehension” 193). Money leads the speaker to sickness because it allows him to spend on food, drink, and sex, but once spent, the money becomes the remedy that can

restore health. Much like the Shakespearean lover who hopes to be cured by falling deeper into the passion that made him sick in the first place (“Pittie me then deare friend, and I assure yee, / Euen that your pittie is enough to cure mee” [111.13-14]), the Hocclevean subject desires more of the money that will drive him back to inordinate eating and drinking. Despite his professed program of penance and reformation, he appears still committed to the ethically questionable project of indulging his appetites.

Indeed, the speaker’s relationship with money, health, and sickness is governed by oxymoron in its medicalized version, *pharmakon*.²⁴ The speaker’s well-being is contingent upon Lord Health, yet the antithesis of health, sickness, is a rhetorical and conceptual continuation of health. To be sick is not merely to abandon the god of health and to embrace his “mortel fo” (22, 52), Sickness, but rather to be punished by Lord Health while remaining in his power. “If that thy fauor twynne from a wight, / Smal is his ese and greet is his greuance” (17-18), the speaker says, implying that the affliction he is suffering from is as much a gift from the god of health (or rather, a withholding thereof) as his previous “prosperitee” was. The speaker is sick because he has fallen out of favour with Lord Health (“Thy loue is lyf. Thyn hate sleeth doun right” [19]), and sickness is as much controlled by the god of health as health itself is. Consequently, the speaker confesses his sins, undergoes penance, and pleads with the god to be restored to this state of grace: “So thow me to thyn grace reconcile. / O now thyn help, thy socour and relief” (54-55); “O God! o helthe! Vnto thyn ordenance, / Weleful lord, meekly submitte I me. / I am contryt and of ful repenance” (401-03). Though sickness is the god of health’s “mortel fo,” at the same time it is touted to be the other side of health, or “Health’s evil twin” (Tolmie, “Professional” 362), where one can only be defined through the other. Hoccleve’s addressee and object of desire in *La Male Regle* is at once salubrious and harmful, for the god of health can strike with malady and cure the subject of the poem in one line. *My Complaint* operates inside the same playing field. There, addressing “Almyghty God,” the speaker praises him because it is in God’s power both to afflict one with a disease and to provide remedy. On the one hand, he claims that “God

²⁴ On the importance of oxymoron to *La Male Regle*, see Davenport.

me deuoided of this greuous venim / That had enifectid and wildid my braine;” he is “the curteise leche moost souerain / Vnto the seke geueth medicine / In need, and hym releueth of his greuous pine” (234-37). But it is, on the other hand, the same God that struck Hoccleve with this affliction in the first place: “Thorough Goddis iust doom and his iugement / And for my best, nowe I take and deeme, / Gaf that good lorde me my punischment ... He gaf me wit and he tooke it away,” the speaker explains (393-95, 400). In *My Complaint* it is the Christian God Hoccleve seeks to converse with, not the allegorical (and pseudo-pagan) god of health, but like Lord Health, this Christian deity poisons and cures the subject of the poem: “God hurte nowe can, and nowe hele and cure” (112).

Further, despite its parodic qualities, *La Male Regle* is also a love poem, in the sense that its contours “repeat the familiar rhetorical outlines of courtly love poetry, the abject posture of the lover-poet before the beloved, replaced by the professional poet and his patron” (Tolmie, “Professional” 361-62). The speaker lacks health (“bare of ioie” and “poore of ese”), therefore what (or who) can restore it becomes the object of desire. Tellingly, in his apostrophes to Lord Health, Hoccleve draws on the courtly vocabulary of erotic passion. By declaring early in the text, “Thy loue is lyf” (19), the speaker reveals that he hopes to be loved by Lord Health, assuming the role of an unrequited lover separated from his beloved (“what thow art now wel remember I can” [27]). The final appeal to the allegorical god, one immediately preceding the autobiographical address to Lord Fournvall (417-48), is likewise illuminating:

My body and purs been at ones seeke,
And for hem bothe, I, to thyn hy noblesse,
As humblely as that I kan, byseeke,
With herte vnfeyned, reewe on our distresse.
Pitee haue of myn harmful heuynesse.
Releeue the repentant in disese.
Despende on me a drop of thy largesse.
Right in this wyse if it thee lyke and plese. (409-16)

Not only is the addressee expected in these lines to act as courtly ladies do (to “reewe” on the speaker’s “distresse” and “pitee” his “harmful heuynesse”), but by placing the speaker in the position of a supplicant lover the stanza rewrites his bodily ailment as a malady of love, where the grace and mercy of his Lord Health (“Now kythe on me thy mercy and thy grace” [406]) is the only thing that can “[r]eleuee . . . dise,” that is, cure him. A begging clerk turns here into a courtly lover afflicted with *morbus venereus*.²⁵

However, desire in *La Male Regle* is not limited to the speaker’s homosocial, if hierarchical, relationship with the god of health. Because sickness is semantically and structurally imbricated in the allegory of health in *La Male Regle*, the bond between the speaker and his lord harbours both well-being and illness, with the disease of desire emerging out of a same-sex relationship. Sickness, meanwhile, is also tenuously allegorized in the poem, which allows the speaker to maintain a separate attachment to this allegorical character. Moreover, Sickness is a female personification: the sins of intemperance and greed, Hoccleve admits, “han me gyded and broght in seruage / Of *hir* that werrieth [afflicts] euery age, / Seeknesse, Y meene” (116-18, emphasis added); and the speaker’s bond with his disease is a passionate one: according to Hoccleve, he is “[v]nto seekenesse . . . kny” (22), where the figurative power of performing “seruage” and being “knyt” to her implies courtly eroticism. Hoccleve is as good as married to his disease, which inserts him into a triangular relationship – a relationship underwritten by passion and disease – with masculine Health and feminine Sickness.

²⁵ Interesting parallels to Hoccleve’s rhetorical strategy can be found in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts. In Chaucer’s translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, love is described as “sike hele and hool seknesse” (4721), and his own begging poem addresses his purse as his “lady dere” (2). In Lydgate’s *Temple of Glass*, an unhappy lover cries, “For but if she my constreint pleinli knew / Hou shuld she euer opon my paynis rwe;” “And that I bie your seruise nov so dere, / As ye me brought into this maledie, / Beth gracious and shapeth remedie;” and “I . . . take louly what wo that I endure / Til she of pite me take vnto hir cure” (667-68; 719-21; 769-70). In a later anonymous poem we encounter the same vocabulary of service and sickness: “Syth yow like nought me peynes to remedy, / nor at my request to graunte me mercy, / In your seruyse to deye, and that I neuer repent; / ffor yow to obeye and serue entendith my best cure, / tyl my lyfe relese his right with-uten forfeiture” (Robbins 139.8-12). As in *La Male Regle*, to love is to serve the object of desire and to be sick, as the mistress both governs the speaker and holds the remedy to cure his erotic pain.

Arguably, the most fascinating aspect of the intersubjective dynamic of pathological desire in *La Male Regle* is that it is analogous to the structure of interpersonal relationships in Shakespeare's sonnets. In both texts we encounter a triangle of affective attachments, with the speaker simultaneously articulating his passion for a masculine and a feminine object. I am far from arguing that Lord Health and Sickness are immediate antecedents of Shakespeare's young man and dark lady, but the recurring pattern of triangular desire merits consideration, largely because in both texts the apparent stability of gender poles is undermined by the operations of erotic disease.

On the one hand, in both Hoccleve and Shakespeare the speaker's bond with the female object of desire differs markedly from his relationship with the male addressee. In Hoccleve, the subject's relationship with Lord Health is governed by rules of social dialogue: not only does the homosocial attachment imitate a conventional written communication with one's superior, especially in its formulaic exuberant salutation, detailed petition, and obsequious conclusion; the erotic dimension of this same-sex relationship is, as we have seen above, expressed in a codified language of courtly love. By contrast, the speaker's desire for Sickness, who is a "fo" to both speaker and his lord (22, 52) and a "cruel thief" (52), is a form of dangerous, perverse intimacy that is never verbalized (he does not speak to Sickness). He is passionately "knyt" to her (just as he was, immorally, "knyt" to his excess), but this intimate bond with Sickness threatens to subvert the speaker's ties with Lord Health: "Who may conpleyne thy disseuerance / Bette than I that, of my ignorance, / Vnto seeknesse am knyht, thy mortel fo?" (20-22). Sickness leads to a form of social exclusion, and therefore a passionate bond with this evil corrupt mistress may have a pernicious effect on the speaker's attachment to Lord Health. The same scenario is seemingly at work in Shakespeare's sonnets, where, as several critics have noted (de Grazia; Gil 103-35; Goldberg, "Romeo"), the speaker's desire for the dark lady, in contrast to his love for the young man, is a form of immoral, asocial passion that threatens to disrupt the stability of the homosocial order.

But on the other hand, in both Hoccleve and Shakespeare the subject's attachment to his two objects of desire cannot be definitively contrasted on the basis of gender. Sickness's relationship with

Lord Health is ambiguous. She is at once a semantic extension of, and an antithesis to, him, so that the Hocclevean subject is unable to determine if the source of his disease lies in the masculine personification of health or in the feminine personification of sickness. Moreover, the rhetoric of the speaker's love for Health and for Sickness defies a clear-cut opposition. Health is metaphorized as money and wealth, yet in describing his relationship with Sickness Hoccleve uses the same monetary trope: "Seeknesse, I meene, riotours whippe, / Habundantly that paieth me my wage" (118-19). Though Health is his "gouverneur" (11) and he is his servant, his intemperance similarly "gyded and broght [him] in seruage" of Sickness (116). At various points in the poem Health and Sickness can and cannot be distinguished with certainty. Yet, as my reading of pathological affect in Shakespeare's sonnets suggests, it is equally difficult to set the subject's erotic bond with the dark lady against his passion for the young man as both are implicated in the operations of erotic disease. The lover of Shakespeare's sonnets is faced with two objects of desire, one masculine and one feminine, yet both are invested with pathogenic qualities harmful to the speaker. As Douglas Trevor puts it, "the gender of these objects matters less than does the way both of them make the speaker renounce as dangerous any emotional attachment to other human beings" ("Love Objects" 230). Although by reading the sonnets in the context of erotic disease I would characterize the attachment to the dark lady and the young man as dangerous, Trevor's formulation captures the pathological indifference of affect in Shakespeare's sequence. In both Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* and in Shakespeare's sonnets sickness destabilizes gender identities, at once diverging the points of erotic attraction and collapsing the homo- and heterosexual attachments into one. Though the mechanisms of disease are fundamentally different in the two texts (venereal infection in the sonnets, semantic ambiguity in *La Male Regle*), the ensuing gender indeterminacy of pathological attachment is similar.

This last point – the indeterminacy of identity and difference – can be further explored through the pecuniary aspects of desire. In the logic of Hoccleve's "penylees maladie" (130) health is equated with money, where the speaker's empty purse is barely distinguishable from his ailing body devoid of health. That money, from one perspective, is the ultimate object of desire in Hoccleve's

poem has profound implications for his poetic identity. By addressing Lord Health as “thy worthy-nesse / [that] [r]egned in me, and was my gouernor” (10-11) and “[w]eleful lord” (402), and asking him to restore the speaker into his “fauour,” Hoccleve emphasizes his subordinate social position vis-à-vis his potential benefactor, turning the poem into a bid for financial and political assistance. In Meyer-Lee’s words, *La Male Regle* asserts “the inescapable relation between money and [Hoccleve’s] social location” (“Apprehension” 181). Lacking money, the speaker undertakes self-abasement that is presented in terms of bodily sickness, urging his future patron to provide monetary and medicinal support for the poet. That the money Hoccleve desires, if it is ever disbursed, will be paid as a direct result of his poetic text, however, includes *La Male Regle* into a network of literary patronage. The poem is presented to its audience “as a token of a writer’s esteem which a noble patron should reciprocate by the gift of money” (D. Mills 102).²⁶

Meanwhile, Shakespeare’s sonnets likewise explore connections between erotic sickness, pecuniary desire, and the social practice of patronage. As critics remind us, though expressions of passionate love and poetic praise, the young man sonnets are at the same time articulations of hierarchical relationships between patron and client. In Arthur Marotti’s useful formulation, “Shakespeare presented himself in these poems as the insecure petitioner who seeks the continuing favor of a patron in order to enjoy social (and probably financial) rewards” (“Love” 410). Many of the sonnets are thus in “quest for the reciprocities of love within the conditions of social inequality that are intrinsic to relations of service” (Schalkwyck 115): uttered by a speaker who is happy to celebrate his lowly state, they are expectations of what looks suspiciously like monetary reward from a social superior.²⁷ In both Shakespeare’s sonnets and Hoccleve’s *La Male Regle*, however, the politics and poetics of pa-

²⁶ For Hoccleve’s attempts to participate in the nascent forms of literary patronage (among his potential patrons one finds Prince Henry and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester), see R. F. Green, *Poet and Princepleasers* 149, 152, 173; Langdell; Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power* 88-123; Perkins; L. Scanlon, *Narrative* 298-350; J. Thompson; Tolmie, “*Prive Scilence*.”

²⁷ On the discourse of patronage in Shakespeare’s sonnets, in addition to Marotti, “Love” 410-13 and “Literary Property” 145-50, and Schalkwyck 115-22, 176-85, see J. Barrell 18-43; Dubrow, *Captive Victors* 202-06; D. Kay, *Shakespeare* 130-33; Magnusson; Matz, *World* 34-47; A. Scott 83-122. On the economic language of the sonnets, see T. Greene, “Pitiful Thrivers;” Herman, “Use;” Mischo; Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 123-51.

tronage are interlocked with the discourse of erotic disease. Sonnet 37 is frequently invoked as an example of Shakespeare's self-abasement before his patron, but what is often missed is that it emerges out of a Hocclevean "penylees maladie:"

As a decrepit father takes delight,
To see his actiue childe do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by Fortunes dearest spight
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.
For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, or all, or more
Intituled in thy parts, do crowned sit,
I make my loue ingrafted to this store:
So then I am not lame, poore, nor dispis'd,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance giue
That I in thy abundance am suffic'd,
And by a part of all thy glory liue:
Looke what is best, that best I wish in thee:
This wish I haue, then ten times happy me.

In this poem we hear a disabled, despised, and destitute lover ("decrepit" and "made lame by Fortunes dearest spight") arguing that his object of desire, in contrast, is in possession of "worth ... truth ... beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit ... or more ... intitled in [his] parts." An act of love between them ("I make my loue ingrafted to this store"), therefore, will both give the speaker access to the material and cultural riches and restore him to physical and financial health and social acceptability ("So then I am not lame, poore, nor dispis'd"). In other words, the subject of the poem is sick, and his object of desire is expected to cure him, which makes the object of desire in this sonnet both a Renaissance patron of the arts and a quasi-Hocclevean Lord Health – the governor of disease and cure and the administrator of financial well-being. For the speaker, an absence of money equals an absence of health

while it is his object of desire who can provide him with both remedy and funds to sustain the speaker's subjectivity.

In formulating his relationship with his patron in terms of sickness and health, Shakespeare appears to echo a long vernacular tradition of writing for patronage in which the speaker represents himself as poor and in pain while the patron embodies health and money. As Antony Hasler has recently argued, such poetry takes place “under the sacrificial sign of an explicit recognition and internalization of deficiency” on the part of the poet, “as the flawed subject is moved into a position of imaginary stability and coherence through encounters with a patronal surrogate” (14, 8). Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* is but one representative of this tradition. Amans in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (dedicated to Richard II and, in the second version, to the future Henry IV) is ravaged by old age; whilst Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* opens with complaints of a sick and destitute poet. In Lydgate's “Letter to Gloucester” the poet also personifies his empty purse as a sick patient: “Botme of his stomak tournyd vp-so-doun / A laxatif did hym so gret outrage, / Made hym slendre by a consump-cioun: / Only for lak of plate and of coinage” (13-16). Bernard André's *Vita Henrici Septimi* features a blind writer, and a similar subject position vis-à-vis the patron is found in the “begging” poems of Dunbar and Skelton.

These poets write in the hope that identification with the wholeness and plenitude of their patrons will restore them to financial and bodily health. Meanwhile, this rhetorical device is firmly rooted in the epideictic tradition of poetic praise, which, Fineman argues, “inscribes upon the ego of the praising poet the specific features of its ideal ego” so that the subject's “identity or unity ... is already pre-figured for him in the compact wholeness of the beloved” (*Eye* 14, 18). We might thus expect to discover in begging poems the sick subject's desire for identificatory homogeneity with his patron, what Fineman describes as “identificatory likeness” (*Eye* 17); and sonnet 37, where the diseased lover begs his beautiful, healthy, and affluent beloved to restore him to health and prosperity, appears to satisfy our expectations. Other poems, however, remind us that the object of the speaker's passion may be as flawed as the speaker himself: both are implicated in the discourse of infectious

disease, making identification easier but subverting the identificatory dynamic of patronal therapy. Conversely, the category of difference between the speaker and the dark lady, we have seen, is partly effaced by the two lovers' sharing some form of venereal disease, although her female body is still touted as the primary site of infection. Erotic sickness undermines the stability of difference and similarity in Shakespeare's sequence; and in this regard, the sonnets might seem to enact a step towards complexity vis-à-vis Hoccleve's *La Male Regle*. In the latter, the speaker's erotically charged relationship with Lord Health follows the trajectory of patronal mimesis, to which the speaker's pathological desire for Sickness forms a counterpoint. In contrast, the Shakespearean subject is at once the same with, and different from, both his male friend and his female beloved, as all three, I have argued, remain plagued by the ravages of erotic fever. But such transparency and simplicity of Hoccleve's triangle is illusory: Sickness's own relationship with Lord Health remains ambivalent, for she is at once his antagonist and his avatar; like Shakespeare's dark lady she is the very difference between health and sickness. The desire for identification with Lord Health and for difference from Sickness cannot be accounted for in either-or logic. Like the three Shakespearean lovers, the Hocclevean subject, his patron (Health), and his beloved (Sickness) cannot be fully identified, and yet the differences between them are not as clear-cut as the gender binarism might imply.

This brings us to the central argument of this section. As the sketch of Hocclevean subjectivity I have attempted in the foregoing pages suggests, the identitarian poetics of *La Male Regle* represents a discursive tradition to which the Shakespearean subject is an heir. Born out of an oxymoronic desire of health and disease embodied in the figure of his literary patron Lord Health/Lord Fournivall, Hoccleve's poetic self prefigures the Shakespearean homosocial bond with the young man in which love metaphorizes money but simultaneously implies sickness and remedy. What *La Male Regle* does for English poetry is articulate a distinct form of subjectivity, a textual positionality that anticipates the entanglements of desire and disease that characterize the same-sex relationship between the speaker and the young man in Shakespeare's sequence. However, Hoccleve complicates his speaker's homosocial attachment to the masculine object of desire (Lord Health) by introducing a feminine per-

sonification, Sickness, with whom the Hocclevean subject also forges a pathologically affective bond. Like the dark lady of the sonnets, she at once repels and incites desire. Hoccleve, equating feminine desirability and illness, maps a discursive space for the Shakespearean subject's sensuous appetite for the infectious dark lady.²⁸ However, in order further to investigate the archaeological ramifications of medieval poetics for Shakespeare's construction of a repulsive feminine object of masculine desire in his sequence, we need to look at Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*.

Henryson's *Testament*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and The Abjection of Desire

Although relatively little is known about its author, *The Testament of Cresseid* is a remarkable poem.²⁹ In the course of just 616 lines, Robert Henryson undertakes a continuation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* but ends up writing a highly original proto-Renaissance postscript to the Trojan legend in English. David C. Benson goes as far as claiming that Henryson is a Renaissance poet in that *The Testament* is "based on the poet's own invention rather than the repetition of approved sources" ("Poet and Critic" 235). Regardless of how one classifies Henryson, from the narrower perspective that constitutes my concern in these pages he if not invents then undoubtedly codifies for the English vernacular a poetics of disease in which the sick – and sickening – feminine body functions as an object of desire for the masculine subject, at once solidifying and disrupting the demarcation lines of masculine selfhood. What is only hinted at in Hoccleve's poem, with its exploration of tenuous links between femininity and sickness, becomes the focus of poetic endeavour in Henryson's text that articulates this scenario of subject formation and makes it available to subsequent writers.³⁰

²⁸ On Hoccleve's ambivalent relationship with (anti)-feminism, see Batt; Torti; Winstead.

²⁹ Henryson was born between 1420 and 1435 and died 1500 and 1506. Evidence suggests that he was a schoolmaster trained in law and must have attended university, and his life and work were associated primarily with Dunfermline. Beyond these scanty facts, Henryson's biography remains a conjecture. See Gray, *Henryson* 1-30; Kindrick 15-19.

³⁰ Although the standard text is found in Henryson, *Poems*, I have used the anglicized version of the poem (*The testament of Creseyde*) from Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer (*The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed* Qqiii^a-Qqvi^b) as one that would have been more readily available to early

The Testament picks up where Chaucer has left off.³¹ The speaker of Henryson's poem, upon reading *Troilus and Criseyde*, opens another book which traces Cresseid's destiny after her separation from Troilus. Abandoned by Diomeid, she is now a prostitute in the Greek camp, denounced by everyone but her father at whose house she finds shelter. Unhappy with her lot, she accuses Venus and Cupid of treachery and blames them for her failed relationship with Troilus. Immediately after that she falls into a trance and has a dream vision, in which a pantheon of seven planetary gods (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Phoebus, Venus, Mercury, and Cynthia) gather for parliament presided over by Cupid. The gods, incensed at what they perceive as Cresseid's ingratitude, pass judgment on her and punish her with melancholy and leprosy. Upon awakening, Cresseid is horrified to discover her physical ugliness caused by the disease; she leaves her father's abode and moves into a leper-house where, purely by chance, she is spotted by Troilus riding past. He barely recognizes her but gives her alms; Cresseid, however, only finds out the name of the donor later. Stricken with guilt, she composes her own testament and dies; Troilus erects a tomb for her and engraves an epitaph on its walls. Henryson concludes by warning other women to mark Cresseid's fate and claiming that he will speak of her no more since she is dead.

The narrative focus of the poem is Cresseid's transformation from a paragon of courtly beauty to a repulsive mass of leprous flesh, something that Henryson himself in the first stanza of the poem calls "tragedy" (Qqiii^a/Fox 4). According to the gods' ruling, she is "[i]n al her lyfe with payne to be opprest / And tourment sore / with sicknesse incurable" (Qqiiii^b/Fox 306-7). Once the sentence is pronounced, the gods proceed with its implementation. Saturn says,

Thy great fairnesse and al thy beauty gay

modern English readers. All quotations will be from Thynne's edition, but for convenience I provide parenthetical references (by line number) to the respective passages in Fox as well.

³¹ Sir Francis Kinaston, in an anecdotal tale of Henryson's last years appended to his 1639 translation of *The Testament* into Latin, describes the poem as "this supplement called the Testament of Creseid, which may passe for the sixt & last booke of [Chaucer's] story ... [W]ittily obseruing, that Chaucer in his 5th booke had related *the* death of Troilus, but made no mention what became of Creseid, [Henryson] learnedly takes vpon him in a fine poetically way to expres the punishment *and* end due to a false vnconstant whore, *which* commonly terminates in extreme misery" (qtd. in Kindrick 18). On Kinaston's translation, see Beadle.

Thy wanton blode / and eke thy golden heer

Here I exclude fro the[e] for euermeere

I chaunge thy myrthe in to melancholy

Whiche is the mother of pensyuenesse

Thy moyster and thy hete / in to colde and dry

Thyne insolence / thy play / and thy wantonese

To great disease / thy pompe and thy richesse

Into mortal nede and great penurie

Thou suffre shalte / and as a beggar dye. (Qqv^a/Fox 313-22)

When Saturn is done with administering his share of the divine punishment, Cynthia adds to Cresseid's suffering. She announces,

Thy christal eyen menged with blode I make

Thy voice so clere vnpleasaunt heer and hace

Thy lusty lere [complexion] ouerspred with spottes blake

And lumpes hawe [lead-coloured] appering in thy face

Where thou comest eche man that flye the place

Thus shalte the[e] go beggyng fro house to hous

With cuppe and clapper lyke a lazarus. (Qqv^a/Fox 337-43)

These stanzas, through graphically disturbing images of gradual corporeal deterioration, imagine the transformation of a female body from health and beauty to sickness and decay. Once Saturn's powers alter the humoural balance in Cresseid's body, depriving her of heat and moisture and making her instead cold and dry, she is left vulnerable to the grips of an incurable disease. In gods' hands her sickness takes an unnaturally accelerated course. By the time Cresseid awakes from her dream, she is disfigured beyond recognition: she is "opprest" with extreme "payne" and "tourment sore," her skin has become marred by "spottes blake," her eyes are filled with discharge mixed with blood, and hide-

ous “lumpes” have formed on her face. She also loses her hair and her voice, which completes this picture of total physical decomposition.

Henryson’s description of Cresseid holds well alongside historical images of medieval leprosy,³² making it an accurate description of the body of a leper, as scholars have been quick to point out (e.g. Kruger 53; Pearman 100-06; Rawcliffe 75). At the same time, and more importantly, those stanzas contain a counter-blazon, a poetic catalogue of ugliness. The quintessential medieval courtly lady, Cresseid is reduced to a compendium of signs of bodily decay. Once a “flour of loue in Troy” (Qqiii⁶/Fox 128), she now shall “to al louers be abmynable” (Qqiiii^b/Fox 308). As a literary event (rather than a historical document), the excerpt both reflects Henryson’s knowledge of what transpired in leper houses of late medieval Scotland and supplies the vocabulary for subsequent writers seeking to represent feminine sickness in a courtly text.

Indeed, as I would like to suggest, Shakespeare’s portrait of the dark lady in his sonnets reclaims for the early modern era the quasi-courtly language of feminine sickness that we find at the heart of Henryson’s late medieval poem. There are interesting parallels between the image of the leprosy-stricken Cresseid and the descriptions of Shakespeare’s mistress. Both women are forced to put on display their blackened skin, sickly complexions, rheumy eyes, vile body odors, and distorted voices. Cresseid’s symptoms of leprosy – “eyen menged with blode,” “voice ... vnpleasaunt heer and hache,” “lere ouerspred with spottes blake,” “lumpes hawe in [the] face,” and “golden heer ... exclude[d]” – replicate the tokens of the French disease as it was envisioned by early modern medicine.³³ Some scholars have even hypothesized that Henryson infects his heroine with syphilis (Row-

³² Cf.: “nerve-numbered or wasted limbs, suppurating lesions, and a contorted or mangled face, with thickened lips and swollen eyebrows ... a distinctive, fetid breath (caused by multiple secondary infections); and ... a hoarse, unnatural voice (attributable to damaged nerves in the larynx and vocal cords)” (Zimmerman 560).

³³ Cf.: “the signes and accidents [of the pox] are these, for the most part venemous pustules, scabbes vpon the forehead, browes, face and beard, and in other partes of the bodie, as about the secret partes” (Clowes 4^v); “certaine pustulls in the head and forehead, with other externall parts of the body, which in time cause greefes at night ... with corruption both of the bones, and other spermatick parts ... abundance of externall vlcers and pusts, falling of haire, both of head, browes, and beard: grieffe in the ioynts, head, legges, and armes” (Lowe B2^v).

land) or some “venereal disease” (Riddy 240; Simpson, *Reform* 188), a theory that has received a skeptical appraisal among critics (Grigsby 98; Hume), primarily on the basis of evidence that syphilis had not reached Scotland until 1497, at least several years after the assumed date of composition of the *Testament*. The ambivalence of Cresseid’s sickness, however, is hardly surprising. In the early modern period, with the relative decrease of leprosy and advent of syphilis, the omnivorous French disease incorporated many of the medical and cultural connotations of its medieval counterpart. As Sander L. Gilman writes, while by the late sixteenth century leprosy had “all but vanished” in Western Europe, “its iconography remained as part of the popular storehouse of images of disease and pollution and was immediately attached to the new disease of syphilis” (252; also see Brody 56-58; Fabricius 3-5; Grigsby 42-44, 70-76, 157-77; Healy 133-37; Rawcliffe 87-88). In order to theorize the new disease (syphilis), early modern doctors had to draw on the categories used by medieval physicians; and poems like Henryson’s also mapped out discursive possibilities for describing the symptomatology of the French pox and for linking infection with femininity. By some syphilis was believed to be a product of coitus between a male leper and a prostitute (Brody 56; Foa 39; Healy 133) while other medical writers (Hermanus [Aⁱ]; Lowe [B³]; Paré [724]; von Hutten [5^v]) argued that certain types of the French sickness could metamorphose into leprosy. One might speculate that while Henryson might have intended for Cresseid’s condition to be read as leprosy, his early modern English readers, equipped with knowledge of the new disease, were at liberty to overinterpret her symptoms as those of the French pox.

The linguistic treatment of the two anti-courtly ladies also evinces intriguing commonalities. The dark lady is constructed as “foul” (127.6; 132.14; 137.12; 144.8; 148.14) and “black” (127.1,3,9; 130.4; 131.12,13; 132.3,13; 147,14) in opposition to “fair,” but so is the sick Cresseid in Henryson’s poem. The *Testament* uses the adjective “fair” to describe Cresseid thirteen times (42, 63, 78, 88, 92, 313, 325, 329, 396, 461, 504, 520, 615), and the poet’s linguistic focus is on her tragic fall from fairness to foulness. When she is abandoned by Diomeid and becomes a prostitute, “faire Creseyde / the floure and a per se / Of Troy and Greece,” according to Henryson, takes to her “foule plesaunce”

(Qqiii^b/Fox 78-79, 83). At this point in the story, the verbal slip from “fair” to “foul” implies a moral rather than physical transformation, but Cresseid’s subsequent somatic change is narrated in similar terms: “she was so deformate / With byles blake ouerspred in her visage / And her fayre colour faded and alterate” (Qqv^b/Fox 394-96). In her last speech, Cresseid describes her sin (and, by extension, its manifestation, i.e. leprosy) as a “fleshly foule affectioun” (Qqvi^a/Fox 558). The linguistic “tragedy” of the poem is that Cresseid’s fairness and beauty are transient and semantically unstable: “Nought is your fairnesse but a fading flour,” she warns all fair ladies of Troy and Greece (Qqv^b/Fox 461). As though to stress this, Henryson continues to refer to Cresseid as “fair” until the end, when the plot renders such references antiphrastic.

Finally, in both cases disease that devours the feminine body is a physical manifestation of two types of moral transgression, sexual and verbal. Saul Brody writes that “Cresseid’s leprosy is a particularly suitable punishment for her promiscuity” (176-77); whereas Bentley maintains, *a propos* Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, that by the end of the sixteenth century in England “Cressida had become an archetype for the diseased courtesan” (59). In contrast, Grigsby argues that Henryson uses leprosy as a punishment for falsification and blasphemy against the gods, not for her sexual appetite (98-102); and Mairi Ann Cullen claims that it is the inappropriate language of her invective against the gods rather than her sexual behaviour that attract divine punishment (152; also Craun 25-35).³⁴ The two are not necessarily unrelated, however. Catherine Cox argues that “Cresseid’s overt discursive errancy – her blasphemy – corresponds to her insinuated sexual errancy; both are presented as promiscuous behaviors within patriarchal parameters, and hence both challenge decorum” (63; see also Pearman 102-03; Riddy 246).

Shakespeare in his sonnets explores the same poetic model, placing his dark lady at an intersection of sexual promiscuity (possibly prostitution) and verbal misdeeds. In sonnet 138, which im-

³⁴ For associations of leprosy with blasphemy and sacrilege in medieval culture, see Grigsby 44-51; Pearman 102-03; Rawcliffe 101. Significantly, after its appearance in early modern Europe, the French disease was also conceived of as a form of punishment for blasphemy (Bentley 9; Boehrer 203-05; Healy 135) and only became associated with promiscuity later.

mediately follows the speaker's admission that by loving his foul mistress, his eyes "to this false plague are ... now transferred" (137.14), he describes her as not only sexually dangerous, promiscuous, and contagious, but as first and foremost false when it concerns language: "When my loue swears that she is made of truth, / I do beleuee her though I know she lyes" (1-2). Nevertheless, he is happy to "credit her false speaking tongue" (7), but as the sonnet progresses it becomes clear that the dark lady's sins of the tongue are imbricated in her sins of the flesh. "Therefore I lye with her, and she with me, / And in our faults by lyes we flattered be," the speaker says in the couplet (13-14), suggesting a pun on "lye:" the lady's sexual acts of lechery (in the context of the sonnets, most likely illicit) and her verbal acts of falsehood cannot be divorced. "In louing thee thou know'st I am forsworne," the sonnet speaker admits, but continues by leveling the same charge at his mistress: "But thou art twice forsworne to me loue swearing, / In act thy bed-vow broake and new faith torne, / In vowing new hate after new loue bearing" (152.1-4). If the dark lady is sick, then her sickness may be read as a form of punishment for verbal and sexual transgressions.

As these analogies between Cresseid and Shakespeare's dark lady suggest, Henryson's poem provides a discursive model for Shakespeare's articulation of the sick feminine body. (This also means that interlacements of poetic and medical misogyny pre-date the antifeminist of syphilographic discourse and of Shakespeare's sonnets by at least a century or even two, if we recall the gender structure of Hoccleve's *La Male Regle*.) Of course the poets move in opposite directions: Shakespeare begins with counter-blazons of his anti-Petrarchan mistress, making her sickness a matter of *a posteriori* conjecture on the basis of the last sonnets, whereas Henryson focuses on literal representations of leprosy and its symptoms, leaving it to the reader to interpret his description as an anti-courtly maneuver. Yet, despite the chiasmic trajectories of aligning disease and femininity (from Petrarchan tropology to medical literality in Shakespeare and from medical precision to courtly figurality in Henryson), the outcome of the two texts is similar: they both localize disease in the female body of an anti-courtly heroine. As Cresseid is "depe enprynted in the fantasy" of Troylus (Qqvi^a/Fox 508), so is she stamped upon the vernacular.

But Henryson's text goes beyond providing Shakespeare with the imaginative and verbal resources for describing the dark lady. A look at its masculine speaker offers an illuminating perspective on the genealogical origins of the Shakespearean subject. As I would like to argue, the *Testament of Cresseid* is vital to our understanding of how Shakespeare in the sonnets constructs his masculine subject of passion and sickness vis-à-vis the diseased feminine object of desire. The *Testament* is preoccupied with masculine identity and the threat disease represents to it. It is easy to miss, however, behind the linguistic pyrotechnics of Henryson's description of Cresseid, that the poem is written in the first person and that the narrator's relationship with Cresseid forms the principal heterosexual bond of the text. Critics have understandably focused on the relationship between Cresseid and her former lover, Troilus, but his figure, I contend, is not the primary site where the poem's masculine self is to be discovered. Troilus remains surprisingly silent throughout the poem except for the two lines he utters upon hearing of Cresseid's death, "I can no more / She was vntrewe / and wo is me therefore" (Qqvi^b/Fox 601-02). During their last meeting, however, Troilus does speak at all (he "rode away / and nat a worde he spake" [Qqvi^a/Fox 523]). We must instead turn to the narrator and his relationship with Cresseid in order to elucidate the complexities of the masculine "I" in Henryson's poem. In contrast to the strangely mute Troilus, the narrator's first-person discourse takes 89 out of 616 lines in the text. Besides, not only is he a self-professed (if possibly retired) servant of Venus ("loues queen / To whom somtyme I hyght obedience" [Qqiii^a/Fox 22-23]), but by assuming the role identical to that of Chaucer's narrator in *Troilus and Creseyde* the speaker identifies with the latter's desire for Creseyde. His lament on the severity of Cresseid's punishment and supplication to Saturn to mitigate the sentence is written in a language of courtly passion:

O crewel Saturne / frowarde and angry
 Harde is thy dome / and too malycious
 Of fair Creseyde / why haste thou no mercy
 Whiche was so swete / gentyl / and amorous
 Withdrawe thy sentence and be gracious

As the[e] were neuer / so scheweth through thy dede

A wrekeful sentence gyven on Creseyde. (Qqv^a/Fox 323-29)

These words implore Saturn for pity (“be gracious”) at the same time as they recall Cresseid’s qualities as a courtly lady (she was “swete,” “gentyl,” and “amorous”), but such nostalgia for her beauty, what Fineman in connection with Shakespeare’s desire for the dark lady calls the “regretting difference” of poetic language from that which it represents, betrays Henryson’s speaker’s desire for Cresseid. The narrator appears to count himself among Cresseid’s lovers, which is reiterated by his final words, “Sithe she is deed / I speke of her no more” (Qqvi^b/Fox 616): these echo Troylus’s only speech in the poem (“I can no more / She was vntrewe / and wo is me therefore”), suggesting that the narrator seeks to knock the Trojan knight off the latter’s position as Cresseid’s designated lover.

Some critics have insisted that masculine identity in Henryson’s poem is founded upon exclusion of the feminine. In one of the most influential readings of the text, Felicity Riddy has used Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection to investigate how the masculine self of Troylus (and, to a lesser extent, of the narrator [see Pearman 96-111]) is consolidated. In Kristeva’s theory of abjection, the subject is formed through expunging the object, and this subject-object differentiation essential to corporeal identification follows the trajectory of *abjection*. Abjection threatens to disturb the order of identity, and its expulsion thus solidifies the borders of the subject. The abject is expelled from the body as the non-self, the Other, so that the boundaries of the body can be drawn: “[R]efuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live ... [Abjection] disturbs identity ... Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by the outside; life by death” (Kristeva, *Powers* 3-4, 71). According to Riddy, Cresseid’s leprous body is abject, and the poem, by repeatedly expunging her (into her father’s home, the leper-house and finally the grave), enacts a “struggle to constitute a stable male identity,” in which Cresseid is “cast out [for the sake of] making masculinity ... She has to have been exiled, repudiated, and stricken with disease so that Troilus can lay claim to the ‘humanitie’ which she attributes to him” (244, 248). The “abiecte odious”

(Qqiii^b/Fox 133) of Cresseid's diseased body must be excluded so that the stability of masculine subjectivity could be asserted. This reading, however, ignores an important feature of the poem, namely, the speaker's erotic bond with Cresseid. The speaker, by assuming the position of Cresseid's lover, desires her, despite her abominable physical ugliness. Repugnance engenders eroticism, so rather than depend fully upon the expulsion of Cresseid, the subject of Henryson's poem, despite his pathologically repulsive descriptions of her infected body, "seems at once to desire and to detest her ... He rejects the body of the feminine, yet desires it; he resents his own dependency, and punishes the feminine because his desire cannot be satisfied without her" (Cox 67, 71).

This model of textual selfhood, one involving a masculine subject attracted to his loathsome feminine object of courtly desire, leads us back to the pathological world of Shakespeare's sonnets. The dark lady poems, I contend, as they make the emotional oxymoron of repugnance and sensuous appetite one of the major topics of poetic rumination, function as a poignant commentary on Henryson's structure of literary identity emerging out of suspended abjection. In one of the most eloquent counter-blazonic sonnets the lover admits:

In faith I do not loue thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note,
But 'tis my heart that loues what they dispise.
Who, in dispight of view, is pleasd to dote.
Nor are mine eares with thy tounge tune delighted,
Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be inuited
To any sensuall feast with thee alone:
But my fiue wits, nor my fiue sences can
Diswade one foolish heart from seruing thee,
Who leaues vnswai'd the likenesse of a man,
Thy proud hearts slaue and vassal wretch to be:

Onely my plague thus farre I count my gaine,

That she that makes me sinne, awards me paine. (141)

This detailed catalogue of the beloved's "errors" is most remarkable for the revolt of the "fiue senses" (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) it registers in the speaker, which curiously parallels early modern emotional responses to the French disease, an interpretive possibility suggested by the sonnet's couplet. In a passage from von Hutten's *De Morbo Galico* the syphilitic body is described analogously, as an object that offends the senses of both patient and observer:

They were byles, sharpe, and stondynge out, hauing the similitude of quantitie of acornes, from which came so foule humours, and so gret stenche, that who so euer ones smelled it, thought hym selfe to be enfect. The colour of thes pustules was darke greene and the syght ther of was more grieuous vnto the pacient than the peyne it selfe: and yet their paynes were as though they hadde lyen in the fyre. (2^v).

Sickly skin and complexion ("her brests are dun" [130.3] while her face is compared to the "gray cheeks of th'East" and quite possibly is "foule" [132.6,14]), revolting sight, putrid smell (in sonnet 130, there is more delight in "some perfumes" than in "the breath that from [his] Mistres reekes" [7-8])³⁵ – the epithets Shakespeare uses to portray his mistress are in line with the symptomatology of a venereal patient. That her voice is unpleasant to the ear ("Nor are mine eares with thy tounge tune delighted" [141.5]; "Musicke hath a farre more pleasing sound" than her voice [130.10]) may likewise be a sign of the pox. As Lowe advises doctors, "[t]ake good heed to the corruption which happeneth in the nose or mouth ... by that means ... the sicke shall feelee dolor, and speake always in the nose" (F1^v). Most importantly, however, despite these disgusting features, the dark lady excites the speaker's desire. While the visual impression may nauseate the lover, his heart is drawn to this spectacle of ugliness; and the lady's "errors" become the lover's eros. And as the medical references in

³⁵ Although, as Booth notes, "reekes" does not necessarily suggest malodorous smell (454), Dubrow argues that the negative connotations of the verb, though unrecorded by *OED*, may have already been available to Shakespeare in the early modern period (*Echoes* 133). Strier argues for the negative connotations (76-77).

the couplet remind us, such inordinate attraction towards a repulsive object of desire constitutes a form of perverse, pathological affect. Like Henryson's narrator drawn to Cresseid who "to al louers [is] abmynable" (Qqiiii^b/Fox 308), the Shakespearean subject loves a woman "[w]ho leaues vnswai'd the likenesse of a man."

Both Henryson and Shakespeare thus explore an aberrant sexual appetite for a revolting female body, but the difference lies in that the Renaissance poet makes the pathological desire of disease (of desire) a matter of poetic reflection while Henryson merely inscribes, very tentatively, such pathological affect in the vernacular:

Oh from what powre hast thou this powrefull might,
VVith insufficiency my heart to sway,
To make me giue the lie to my true sight,
And swere that brightnesse doth not grace the day?
Whence hast thou this becomming of things il,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds,
There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
That in my minde thy worst all best exceeds?
Who taught thee how to make me loue thee more,
The more I heare and see iust cause of hate,
Oh though I loue what others doe abhor,
VVith others thou shouldst not abhor my state.
If thy vnworthinesse raisd loue in me,
More worthy I to be belou'd of thee. (150)

Again, the speaker in this sonnet is in love with an object of darkness and disgust who is so capable of aestheticizing her symptoms ("things il") that even the "the very refuse of [her] deeds" – possibly, as we have seen, noxious discharge from her syphilitic sores – serves as an aphrodisiac for the speaker. Like Henryson's narrator, he loves "what others do abhor." Yet, the poem is structured as a series of

unanswered questions and thus depicts the speaker's frenzied musings on the sick nature of his desire, where disgust and irresistible attraction are mingled ("Who taught thee how to make me loue thee more, / The more I heare and see iust cause of hate"). How is it possible, he wonders, to love someone so odious? Where does her power ("this powrefull might") to move his heart to passion with her imperfections ("[vv]ith insufficiency my heart to sway") come from? To formulate questions about the possibility of perverse passion is a bigger challenge than simply to admit to such pathological affect, as Henryson does. However, this is one of those crucial points where Shakespeare's "novel subject carries with it the memory of that which it displaces" (Fineman, *Eye* 15). In articulating his questions about the poetics of pathological affect Shakespeare reveals his dependence on this poetics in the production of which Henryson's text is directly involved. Shakespeare's reflection on abject desire is predicated upon its pre-existence in vernacular literary discourse.

It is not only the oxymoronic mechanism of abomination and attraction towards a revoltingly diseased female body that finds its way from Henryson's poem into Shakespeare's sonnet. The speaker in Shakespeare's sonnet himself is diseased and as abhorrent to others as his lady is to him. The chiasitic distribution of abomination in the text of the sonnet ("Oh though I loue what others doe abhor, / VVith others thou shouldst not abhor my state"), as I have already suggested, implicates the speaker and his mistress in a process of mutual contamination, marking them both as victims of *morbis venereus*. In Henryson's poem, however, Cresseid is not the only character who is sick – the narrator is also articulated through the categories of disease and health because he, too, suffers from some form of erotic malady. Once a servant of Venus, he hoped that his "faded herte of loue she wolde make grene," but "for great colde" he cannot pray and is forced to hide in his chamber, abandoning all hope of resuscitating his former passion. He admits that in "a man of age" like himself, "[t]hough loue be hote," "[i]t kyndleth not so soone as in youthhed" and his "corage [is] duf and deed," despite his recourse to "phisyke [medicine]" (Qqiii^a/Fox 22-35). The speaker, oscillating between the figurative and the literal dimensions of heat and cold, is thus recognizable as a sick subject of desire. Henryson, however, offers a unique take on the clichéd poetic figure of the disease of love:

in his version, it is not love that becomes the lover's sickness as it does in Shakespeare's sonnets, nor is it a consequence of inordinate passion as it is in *La Male Regle*. Instead, in Henryson's poem it is the speaker's inability to desire that becomes the malady of love. Yet, in spite of such a rearrangement of the trope, the subject of the poem is still produced by a configuration of disease and passion.

Symptomatically, Henryson describes his narrators' poor health using the same textual device as Hoccleve's *Complaint* and Shakespeare's sonnets 73 and 97, for *The Testament* opens with a description of dismal weather:

A doly seasoun fyt a careful dyte
Shulde corespond / and be equiuolent
Ryght so it was whan I began to write
This tragedy / the weder richt feruent
Whan Aries in myddes of the lent
Schowres of hayle can fro the northe discende
That scantly fro the colde I myght me defende. (Qqiii^a/Fox 1-7)

Although it is spring (the middle of Lent), the narrator suffers from extreme cold: "The northern wynde," he says, had "shedde hys mighty cloudes fro the skye;" "The frost fresed / the blastes bitterly ... And caused me remoue ayenst my wyl" (Qqiii^a; Fox 17-19,21). Given the Chaucerian subtext of Henryson's poem, this may be another disguised reference to *The Canterbury Tales*, but of greater significance is the connection Henryson – like Hoccleve before and Shakespeare after him – draws between poetic landscape and his speaker's health. The bleak landscape outside the narrator's window is a mirror image of his physical infirmity.

The opening stanzas of the *Testament* then construct "a disabled body that is in need of restoration and cure" (Pearman 97), to which the revolting figure of the diseased Cresseid offers a proto-Shakespearean counterpoint. In many respects, the subjects of Henryson's poem and Shakespeare's sonnets are quite different. The Shakespearean subject's disease is a form of erotic infection spread by his contagious mistress, whereas in *The Testament* the speaker's malady is not leprosy, nor does he

contract it from Cresseid. (However, the speaker's passion for Cresseid, suspending the mechanism of abjection, invites his sick object of desire to invade and adulterate his subjectivity, so that Cresseid's feminine infected body can be re-imagined as the infecting one.³⁶) Besides, as I have already suggested, Shakespeare's accentuated interest in scrutinizing the particulars of his suffering self finds no equivalent in Henryson's narrative poem, which leaves the work of subjective introspection to the reader. Yet, despite these important differences, the vocabulary and syntax of subjectivity in Shakespeare's sonnets are genealogically related to *The Testament of Cresseid*. In both texts the masculine self emerges out of a pathological desire for abject femininity that threatens to disrupt the lover's subjectivity with disease.

But the structural analogies between the forms of selfhood in Shakespeare and Henryson go beyond the process of heterosexual desire. *The Testament of Cresseid* offers its own version of the triangular form of emotional attachment we have already encountered in Shakespeare and Hoccleve. In Henryson's poem the narrator is constructed against two points of identification: the sick feminine body of Cresseid on the one hand, and the sublime body of Troylus on the other. The latter is described as "cheiftayne worthy Troylus," and he enters the poem on the back of a "merueylous" victory over the Greeks, surrounded by "great tryumphe / and laude victorious" (Qqvi^a/Fox 485, 487-88). Though at this point in the poem there is no reference to his health, Troylus's perfection stands in obvious contrast to the sick narrator and the leprous Cresseid. The poem, therefore, enacts a proto-Shakespearean script of identificatory sameness and difference, where the primary masculine subject of the poem (narrator) is at once different (in terms of gender) from and similar (in terms of health) to the sick Cresseid, and at once identical (in terms of gender) to and different (in terms of health) from Troylus. If Cresseid is a threat to the stability of the speaker's subjectivity, then Troylus is a point of

³⁶ A parallel to this scenario of unlikely contagion is found in Sir Francis Kinaston's gloss on Henryson's biography. He dwells at length upon the circumstances of the poet's death, who "being very old he dyed of a diarrhea or fluxe" (qtd. in Kindrick 18). The textual proximity of this description of the poet's failing body to the description of Cresseid's illness suggests, as Healy writes, that "Cresseid is no longer just a danger to herself: Kinaston rather curiously implicates Henryson's depiction of her disease in the poet's own painful demise" (137).

ideal identification, an imaginary ideal ego invested with health and plenitude. The narrator's afflicted body is indeed in need of restoration, but while critics like Riddy and Pearman see the possible cure to his disease in the exclusion of Cresseid, I suggest that Henryson's narrator in fact refuses to expunge Cresseid's abject body, opening instead the boundaries of his selfhood to her sickness in an act of passionate incorporation, but more importantly, that the ultimate recuperation of the narrator's sickness lies in his imaginary identification with the ideal Troylus.

Indeed, Troylus is the narrator's unattainable model in more senses than one: not only is he (unlike the narrator) healthy, and not only does he (unlike the narrator) have direct access to Cresseid's body, but his wealth makes him a patron-like figure similar to Hoccleve's Lord Health and Shakespeare's young man of sonnet 37. As Jana Mathews notes *a propos* the opening stanzas of Henryson's poem, the dismal weather during the planting season in Scotland signifies "imminent material loss" (41), making the narrator's disease of desire a form of "penylees maladie." Poverty is also one of the manifestations of Cresseid's disease: Saturn changes "To great disease / thy pompe and thy richesse / Into mortal nede and great penurie / Thou suffre shalte / and as a beggar dye" (Qqv^a/Fox 320-22). Both narrator and his object of desire are destitute. Troylus, in contrast, gives Cresseid "[a] purse of gold / and many a gay iewel" (Qqvi^a/Fox 521), suggesting that the speaker's financial disease can be corrected through identification with Troylus.

It is easy to notice that this is the scenario of intersubjective relationship that we have encountered in the other two texts, with Shakespeare's speaker desiring the health and wealth of his friend and the illness of his mistress, and Hoccleve's subject emerging out of a homosocial bond with Lord Health, governor of riches, and his pathological passion for Sickness. I have also suggested that in both Shakespeare and Hoccleve the ideal (quasi-Finemanean) scenario of contrasting the pathology of heterosexual affect and the ideality of homosocial identification does not bear scrutiny, for erotic disease subverts the stability of gender differentiation, implicating all members of the passionate triangle in some degree of sickness. But the same applies to Henryson's *Testament*: notwithstanding Troylus's ideality, in the process of communication with Cresseid his seemingly unassailable body

falls prey to erotic sickness: “A sparke of loue” he feels upon remembering Cresseid, “tyl his hert couth spring / And kyndeled his body in a fyre / With hote feuer / in swette / and trymblyng” so that “he was redy to expire” (Qqvi^a/Fox 512-15). What he feels is an onrush of passionate desire, but it is also a desire that takes a pathological form: his body is “in a fyre,” he suffers from “hote feuer” and “trymblyng,” he “swette[s]” and is “redy to expire.” Not only Henryson’s language is pointedly medical here; his vocabulary is in fact sinister. Rather than an innocuous bout of love sickness (although, as we have seen earlier, love melancholy was far from benign), this is a debilitating, destructive proto-Shakespearean disease of passionate love. Troilus’s vision of his own fate in Chaucer’s romance – “I wot that whan ye next me se, / So lost have I myn hele and ek myn hewe” (V.1402-03) – comes true at the end of Henryson’s poem. And like in Shakespeare’s sonnets, where the dark lady “tempteth my better angel from my sight, / And would corrupt my saint to be a diuel / Wooing his purity with her fowle pride” (144.6-8), Troilus is infected with this disease by Cresseid. The tainted and tainting bodies of Cresseid and the dark lady poison whoever comes into contact with them.

Passionate selfhood, however, is not the only form of identity that can be crippled by the disease of love. The poetic self, the very identity of the poet, is threatened by erotic sickness as well, although (again, paradoxically) it is the disease that engenders the poetic discourse of a sick lover in the first place. In Shakespeare’s sonnet 147, with which I began, the lover’s “feauer” (1) is a danger to poetry itself: the speaker’s “discourse as mad men’s” is (11) in that it is “[a]t randon from the truth vainly exprest” (12) for, the poet explains, “I haue sworne thee faire, and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as darke as night” (13-14). The debilitating illness not only devours the lover’s body, but puts poetry itself at risk. As Cynthia Marshall writes, “the poem is ultimately less concerned with physical, moral, or emotional effects of the ‘disease’ than with its debilitating effects on ‘discourse’” (69). In my opinion, however, it is not a matter of less or more, but a question of direct correlation between physical illness and the failure of poetic discourse to provide any kind of epistemological or categorical certainty. The chasm that opens between text and reality implicates the sonnet in the limitations of diseased “discourse” (the last word, it has been noted, “chimes aurally with

desire and disease” [Roychoudhury 19]). An absence of correspondence between what *is* and what *is thought* and *sworn* renders the text of the sonnet pathological as sickness not only erodes the lover’s body but spills into his words, infecting the poem. Though Trevor has suggested that “it is the act of writing alone that can cure the speaker’s malignant vision” (“Love Objects” 230), the sonnets often link the pernicious effects of excessive passion with poetic malady, especially in the most self-consciously meta-poetic group of poems – the rival poet sub-sequence (sonnets 78-86). There the speaker’s erotic jealousy intermingled with poetic rivalry result in an “infebled” line (86.14) as perverse passion degrades his verse: “But now my gracious numbers are decayde, / And my sick Muse doth giue an other place” (79.3-4), a sentiment repeated in the next sonnet (“my loue was my [poetic] decay” [80.14]). A bodily crisis triggers an erosion of the poetic medium of the sonnets.

But Shakespeare is not alone in analyzing the disintegration of his poetic abilities in the face of a crippling sickness, nor is he the first English poet to connect the pathology of affect and the degeneration of writing. Hoccleve in *La Male Regle* includes an extended invective against flattery (201-88), which, like sickness, takes the form of a feminine personification: like a siren, “so inly mirie syngith shee / That the shipman therwith fallith asleepe, / And by hir aftir deuoured is he” (237-39). Gender is not the only point of intersection between flattery and sickness in Hoccleve’s poem, however. The speaker describes the former as “venym of faueles tonge” (211) and “lurkyng pestilence” (260) – that is, a form of disease. Even more importantly, the work of flattery is likened to that of poetic discourse: man would do well, Hoccleve writes, “[t]o stoppe his eres fro thy [flattery’s] poesie, / And nat wolde herkne a word of thy sentence, / Vnto his greef it wer a remedie” (262-64). But by coupling flattery simultaneously with his sickness (he spent his money expecting to be flattered) and poetry Hoccleve fatally compromises his own text. As a begging poem asking Lord Health for money, *La Male Regle* deploys various rhetorical strategies, among which excessive praise of the addressee – that is, a form of flattery – are key to the success of the enterprise. As Meyer-Lee phrases it, the poet’s “pronouncements on the sociopolitical illness of flattery are underwritten by the fact of his

suffering from this illness” (*Poets and Power* 102). By urging his audience to ignore the “poesie” of “faueles tonge,” Hoccleve debilitates his own text and commits rhetorical suicide.

Likewise, in Henryson’s poem, the diseased narrator who carries an emotional attachment to the leprosy-stricken Cresseid undermines the validity of his own discourse. Not only does he question the authority of Chaucer’s poem, but he considers the second book, the story of Cresseid’s tragic end, equally suspect: “Who wot if al that Chaucer wrate was trewe / Nor I wotte nat if this narration / Be authorysed or forged of the newe / Of some poete” (Qqiii^b/Fox 64-67). His own discourse is thus doubly jeopardized as both the original Chaucerian romance and its anonymous continuation are thrown into a disarray of literary validation. As a textual positionality utterly dependent upon Chaucerian discourse for his very existence, through questioning the textual foundations of his textual identity Henryson’s narrator condemns his poetic subjectivity to decay. Considering the medical content of the poem as well as the evidence from Shakespeare’s sonnets and Hoccleve’s *La Male Regle*, the link *The Testament of Cresseid* posits between erotic sickness and textual crisis is hard to ignore. In all three texts explorations of erotic disease translate into a form of textual sickness, where bodily symptoms of sick desire erode the foundations of poetic discourse, threatening to infect its subject with various kinds of ailment.

* * *

My primary objective in this chapter was to demonstrate the relevance of medieval poetics to the study of Shakespeare’s sonnets. The textual subject of Shakespeare’s sequence, I argued, is enunciated, among other vocabularies, in the language derived from the fifteenth-century poems of Thomas Hoccleve and Robert Henryson. What brings together these writers, who otherwise might appear to be ruthlessly and irrevocably pulled apart by history and literary form, is their obsession with figurations of erotic malady; and whereas the manifest form the disease of love takes in their texts does differ from poet to poet (becoming syphilis and inordinate passion in Shakespeare, mental disorder

and diarrhea in Hoccleve, and leprosy in Henryson), they nonetheless belong to the same rhetorical culture in which the desire of sickness and the sickness of desire are intertwined in the shape of pre- and post-Petrarchan oxymoron. These poets, although in different ways, construct textual identities out of the paradoxical poetics of *pharmakon*, where the object of desire simultaneously infects and cures the speaker, and explore how the boundaries of individual selfhood collapse under attack from amorous sickness, and how porous poetic identity becomes when it is faced with pathological affect. Shakespeare's "invention of poetic subjectivity" is in many respects anticipated by the radical poetics of pathological self-examination developed by such poets as Hoccleve and Henryson. Consequently, if we wish to grasp some of the complexities of Shakespeare's vernacular identity, we need to acknowledge that in some respects the sonnets re-enact earlier scenarios of literary subjectivity, such as those found in *La Male Regle* and *The Testament of Cresseid*, and to allow the medieval vicissitudes of infected desire into our interpretation of Shakespeare's sequence.

This argument is no more than Shakespeare himself says. Sonnet 106 exposes its own entanglement in a complex of antecedent texts in which similar passions find their articulation:

When in the Chronicle of wasted time,
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beautie making beautifull old rime,
In praise of Ladies dead, and louely Knights,
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauties best,
Of hand, of foote, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique Pen would haue exprest,
Euen such a beauty as you maister now.
So all their praises are but prophesies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And for they look'd but with deuining eyes,
They had not still enough your worth to sing:

For we which now behold these present dayes,
Haue eyes to wonder, but lack tounge to praise.

I cannot attempt a detailed reading of this poem here, but its principal imaginative fulcrum is the conflict between the poetic practice of the past (“Chronicle of wasted time” written in an “antique Pen”) and the writing of “these present dayes.” This is a “backward-looking sonnet” (Duncan-Jones, *Sonnets* 322), in the sense that it seeks to define Shakespeare’s own place vis-à-vis antecedent literary history; it is thus not surprising that it has attracted significant critical attention.³⁷ What interests me in this sonnet is that its speaker imagines his poetry of blazonic praise (“blazon of sweet beauties best, / Of hand, of foote, of lip, of eye, of brow”), which gestures unequivocally towards Petrarchism (see Vickers, “Blazon” 96), as if underwritten by descriptions of “Ladies dead, and louely Knights” derived from the past. These past “descriptions” are “prophesies” of Shakespeare’s texts, “prefiguring” the parameters of early modern poetry. As Fineman notes, though “the young man, by convention, gets the better of it . . . a kind of odd and self-conscious literary retrospection attaches itself” to the poem (50). The sonnet argues that the poetry of “these present dayes” is in fact sustained by past articulations of passion, for the moderns, while they may enjoy a superior subject matter (“your worth”), still “lack tounge to praise,” these remaining the prerogative of the ancients. Or, as I have suggested in this chapter and in this dissertation in general, Renaissance Petrarchism in its articulations of desire reactivates earlier models of discourse and subjectivity. The “Chronicle of wasted time” has been variously identified as “medieval annals and romance” (Kerrigan 8), “old chivalric literature” (Duncan-Jones, *Sonnets* 322), “old minnesingers and trouvères” (Vendler 442), and most recently as *The Faerie Queene* (Cheney, “Sonnet 106”). But such identifications, while immensely useful, are either reductive in their specificity (Cheney, Kerrigan) or hostile towards Shakespeare’s vernacular past (Vendler). The language of the sonnet, meanwhile, is pointedly abstract (although the opposition of “Ladies dead” and “louely [i.e. amorous] Knights” encapsulates the dynamic of Henryson’s poem); it is inviting rather than foreclosing, suggestive rather than restrictive. What the poem

³⁷ For an exhaustive overview of criticism, see Cheney, “Sonnet 106” esp. 337-40.

does do is acknowledge the existence of poetic precursors on which the early modern discourse relies; even though the subject matter may have changed, the poetic “touns” remain heirs to vernacular literary traditions, from medieval amatory verse and anti-courtly escapades to penitential modes of discourse and begging poetry. As I have attempted to show in this chapter, learning to read these “touns” can offer new perspectives on Shakespearean poetry.

Conclusion

The “English Straine” of Early Modern Petrarchism

This dissertation began with Chaucer’s *Troilus*, the first instance of Petrarchism in pre-modern England, so I would like to conclude it with what can be seen as one of its last manifestations, the prefatory sonnet from Michael Drayton’s sonnet sequence *Idea*. Printed initially in 1594 as *Ideas Mirrour*, Drayton’s sequence was later re-titled *Idea* and remained in print, with each next version incorporating further additions, omissions, and revisions, for the next twenty-five years, until its final iteration *Idea: In Sixty Three Sonnets* was included in Drayton’s 1619 *Works* (which were also re-printed in 1631). Drayton’s sequence, despite its origins in the 1590s, is thus one of the final examples of early modern English Petrarchism, a kind of afterword to the fashion on the brink of extinction. In this light it is not surprising that “To the Reader of these Sonnets” seeks to delineate the poet’s relationship with the past and present of English amatory writing:

INTO these Loves, who but for Passion lookes,
At this first sight, here let him lay them by,
And seeke else-where, in turning other Bookes,
Which better may his labour satisfie.
No farre-fetch’d Sigh shall ever wound my Brest,
Love from mine Eye a Teare shall never wring,
Nor in Ah-mees my whyning Sonnets drest,
(A Libertine) fantastickly I sing:
My Verse is the true image of my Mind,
Ever in motion, still desiring change;
And as thus to Varietie inclin’d,
So in all Humors sportively I range:

My Muse is rightly of the English straine,

That cannot long one Fashion intertaine. (Drayton 310)

This sonnet, I suggest, can be taken as an emblem of the complex entanglements of Medieval and Renaissance desires and subjectivities engulfing early modern English Petrarchan poetry which this thesis has explored. Drayton is concerned here with distancing himself from the jaded tradition of Petrarchan writing, from “whyning Sonnets” in which one finds “farre-fetch’d Sighs, Teares, and Ah-meas,” arguing that he instead is a “Libertine” poet who sings “fantastickly,” that is, following the rules of imagination rather than the conventional “Fashion” of courtly verse. It is curious, however, that railing against clichéd Petrarchism, Drayton locates the foundations of his “Libertine” poetics in what he himself describes as “the English straine.” Granted, he associates this poetic “straine” with “Varietie,” “desiring change,” and inability “long one Fashion [to] intertaine,” yet the possible meanings of “strain” in early modern English include not just “thread, line or streak” but, crucially, “pedigree, lineage, ancestry, or descent” as well as “constraint, compulsion, or requirement” (*OED*). Drayton’s poetic freedom proves to be a form not just of inclusion in textual tradition, but of dependence on literary lineage and even of writing under the constraints of the past. His English “Muse” emerges as both liberating in her variability and shape-shifting and inhibitory and stifling in her insistence on adherences to the pre-existent principles of English poetry.

Although allusions to Sidney (“Bookes,” “Muse”) and Spenser (“Loves” seems to be an Anglicized form of the Italianate *Amoretti*) give some hint as to what authors and texts constitute “the English straine,” the tradition that Drayton claims to continue is “notably brief and vague” and its contours “are never made explicit” (Warley, *Sonnet Sequences* 2). We can just as legitimately read “the English straine” as an invocation of the whole institution of pre-modern English writing, from Langland and Chaucer to Shakespeare and Drayton himself. This tradition “[e]ver in motion, still desiring change” is characterized by “Varietie” and ranging in “all Humors,” which makes its influence hard to grasp, yet *Idea* is unequivocally indebted to it. Drayton’s apparently original “Loves” receive

their meaning elsewhere, in “the English straine” that underwrites his post-Petrarchan sonnets and authorizes their multifarious desires.

This inherently variable and changeable “English straine” of English Renaissance Petrarchism has been the focus of this dissertation. Just like the subject of Drayton’s prefatory sonnet reveals the existence of “the other scene” of his loving and writing – the antecedent poetic tradition which pre-articulates his Petrarchan utterances – I have attempted to demonstrate that early modern Petrarchan poetry in many instances relies in its expressions of desire and subjectivity on medieval forms of discourse and identity. I have argued that vernacular medieval poetry and poetics remain a meaningful part of the English literary imaginary well into the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and that they are essential to our understanding of English Renaissance poetry, including Petrarchism, for the poetic practice of the English Middle Ages anticipates many of the developments of Petrarchan verse in early modern England.

In Chapter One I have suggested that the poetics of meed that Langland invents in the opening passūs of *Piers Plowman*, a form of discourse in which courtly desire clashes with laureate ambition, continues to invest with longing and anxiety the Petrarchan texts of Wyatt and Spenser, poets who place a complex interlacement of erotic payment and pecuniary reward at the centre of their poetic worlds. Chapter Two has argued that the anti-Petrarchan experiments of Surrey and Sidney, as well as their fragmented subjectivities, are anticipated by Chaucer’s poetics of melancholy (articulated most eloquently in the *Book of the Duchess*), which entails a form of subjectivity founded on an indefinite splintering of the self and a mode of writing which at once engenders and sabotages the production of amatory verse. In Chapter Three I have investigated the master trope of royal imprisonment, and I have traced its origins both to the medieval love poems of the incarcerated princes James I Stewart and Charles d’Orléans, and to the political philosophy of Sir John Fortescue and George Buchanan. The significance of this poetic, political, and philosophical figure to the English vernacular imaginary renders it vital, I have argued, for our understanding of how the imprisoned self is constructed in the Petrarchan poems of Mary Stewart and Lady Mary Wroth. Lastly, in Chapter

Four I have attempted to problematize the notions of modernity and innovation frequently associated with the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets. By emphasizing the role of erotic sickness in the production of selfhood, I have suggested that the Shakespearean subject of venereal disease draws on the vernacular precedents of Hoccleve's *La Male Regle* and Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, both of which (albeit in different ways) anticipate some aspects of Shakespearean selfhood, such as the importance of disease to the emergence of individual subjectivity, the relationship between lover and beloved that takes the form of *pharmakon*, and the attendant ethical and poetic issues that accompany poetry which is willing to open itself to erotic infection. Each of these chapters is a stand-alone case study of a distinct form of poetic identity that is formulated in medieval poetry and later re-emerges in early modern Petrarchan writing. Taken together, however, these studies suggest the significance of medieval forms of discourse and identity to a broad range of early modern Petrarchan texts.

Of course one dissertation cannot exhaust the whole spectrum of potential forms of poetic continuity between medieval poetry and early modern Petrarchism. For example, the significance of medieval technologies of the self for early modern Petrarchan poetry can also be traced in the influence on sonneteering of John Gower's magisterial *Confessio Amantis*. Gower's poem is preoccupied with confession as a form of hermeneutics of erotic desire and guilt, and by investigating the poetic re-deployment of this sacrament by such diverse sixteenth-century writers as the Catholic George Watson and the Protestant Fulke Greville in their confession-like Petrarchan sequences (*Εκατομπαθία*, or, *Passionate Centurie of Love* (1582) and *Caelica* (1633) respectively), we can investigate the historical trajectories of erotic and religious subjectivity from Ricardian to Jacobean culture. Analogously, medieval religious poetry that frequently uses erotic discourse to articulate spiritual desires can be read alongside early modern English religious sonnet sequences, including Anne Locke's *Meditation of a Penitent Sinner* (1560), Henry Lok's *Syndry Christian Passions* (1593-7), Henry Constable's *Spirituall Sonettes* (1594), Barnabe Barnes's *A diuine centurie of spirituall sonnets* (1595), Nicholas Breton's *The Soules Harmony* (1602), the religious sonnets of William Alabaster, John Bradshaigh's *Virginalia* (1632), and John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* (1633). Finally, such medieval

poems as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Lydgate's *Troy Book*, which recast private sexual desire into the mold of public discourse on European and national history, can provide an illuminating pre-text for Petrarchan sequences like Samuel Daniel's *Delia* (1591), Thomas Lodge's *Phyllis* (1593), and Giles Fletcher's *Licia* (1593), all of which include an appended narrative poem depicting historical characters and the impact of their erotic desire on the course of English history. In short, much remains to be done.

What this dissertation does achieve, I hope, is to open a dialogue between Medieval and Renaissance English poetry. The mutually elucidating readings of medieval and early modern texts suggest not just the desirability but in fact the necessity for early modernists to embark on what John Watkins in his recent review essay has described as "reading in more comparative temporal ... contexts" ("Recent Studies" 249). For learning to discern the medieval voices within Renaissance poetic utterances enriches not only our understanding of pre-modern poetry: in the end, by investigating the vernacular genealogies of Renaissance discourses and subjectivities we can not only discover new meanings of the canonical texts and thus achieve a clearer view of the literary practices of the past, but assess and rethink some of our critical practices of the present.

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